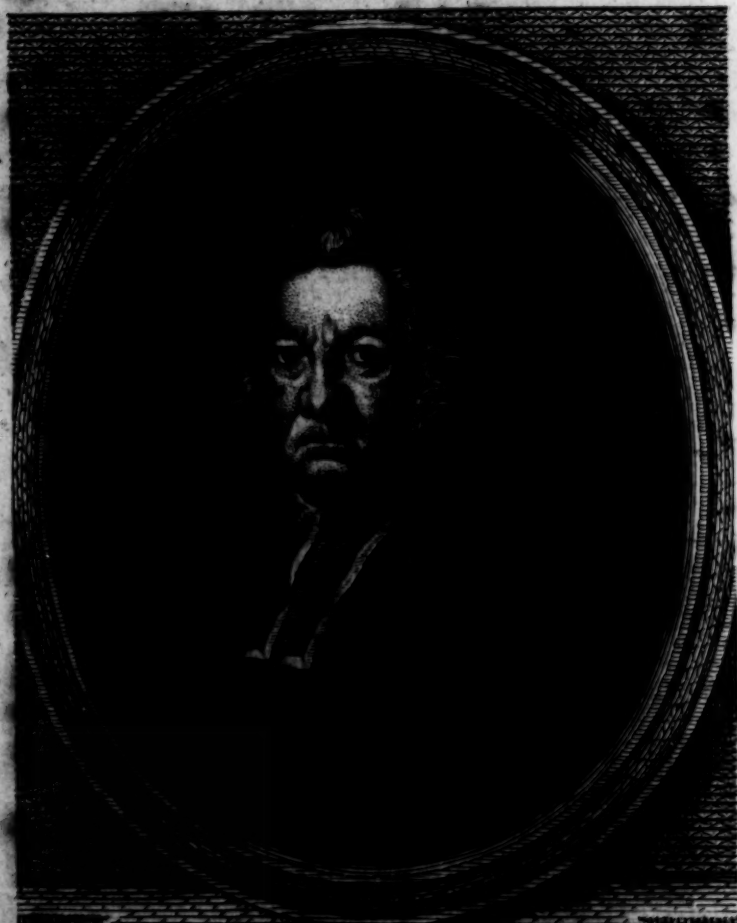


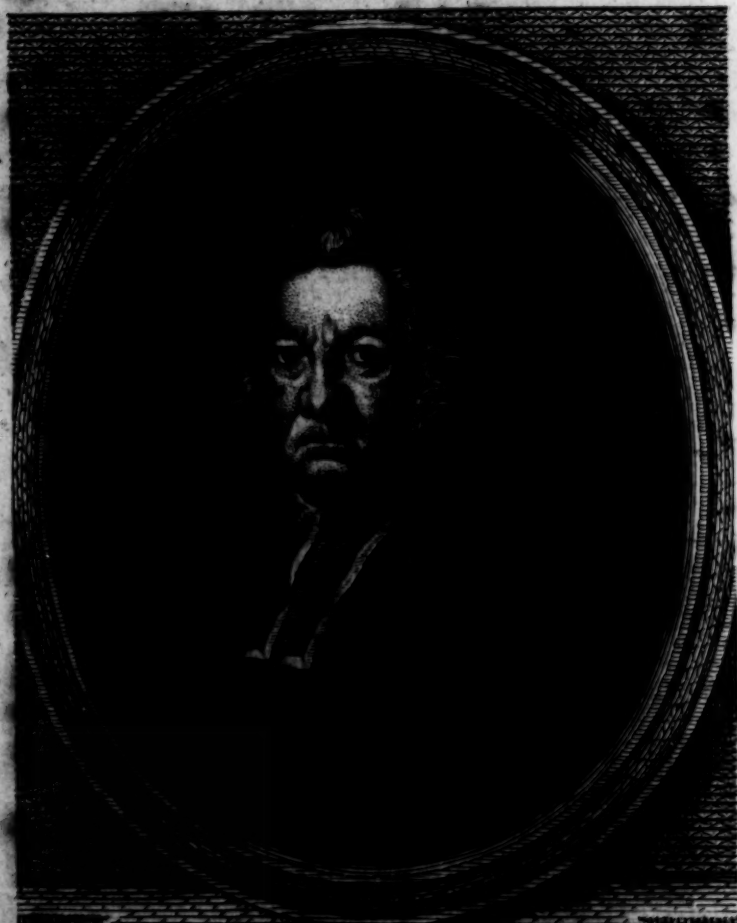


The Reverend  
*Saml. Chandler D.D. F.R. & A.S.*  
Died May 8<sup>th</sup> 1766. Aged 73.

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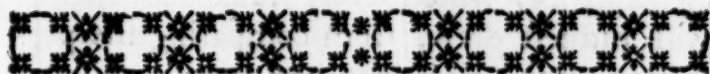
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# T H E P R E F A C E.

WE at length offer to the world the four Volumes of Dr. *Chandler's* Sermons, published according to his directions in his last will. The sickness of the Editor occasioned a delay in the publication. Most of these Sermons were transcribed for the press by the Doctor himself, and the few others are either such as he had declared his intention to print, or were added at the request of some of his most judicious hearers. They are the Doctor's *genuine* works, and have undergone no other alterations, than were necessarily to be made in posthumous Sermons; that they might appear tolerably correct. The Subscribers are desired to excuse the want of one of the discourses, promised in the introduction to the Sermons, on the *Excellence* of our *Saviour's Doctrines*. The loss of it was not perceived, 'till several of the discourses were printed off, and it could not be recovered after the strictest search. The loss is however the less important, as the sermon was wholly employed in illustrating a  
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consequence,

consequence, which every judicious Reader will himself draw, from comparing the perfection of the doctrines and morals of Jesus Christ, with the circumstances of his birth and education : “ That he was indeed what he claimed to be, the Son of God, and filled with his spirit.”

We hope the Reader will find in the first volume many important observations, set in a light fitted to increase his faith in the Christian revelation, and his value for it ; and particularly in the Sermons on the *Ascension of Christ*, and the *Effusion of the Holy Spirit*. The *practical* discourses will be found *judicious* and *animated* ; and should any Readers be less pleased with some Sermons in the *fourth* volume, on a controverted subject, and think the account therein given of the *corruption of human nature* to be *aggravated* above fact and experience ; we beg them to consider,—that the Doctor allows this *disorder*, as far as it is *natural*, to be in no sense our *fault*, or imputed to us as such by God our Creator ; but to be merely a *trial* of our virtue, and obedience to our heavenly Father, who will, as becomes his equity and goodness, make every reasonable *allowance* for it, and grant answerable *assistance* to those who ask it, and who hath provided a suitable *remedy*. That the *honour* of God as our *Creator* and *moral Governor* is thus *vindicated* ; and persons may amicably differ as to the *more* or *less* of this natural disorder and weakness, and be left to determine their sentiments



## The P R E F A C E.

iments by impartial observation, and experience.

The charge given by Dr. *Candler*, that his funeral Sermon should be *without* a character of him, seems to lay a restraint upon the *Editor* from prefixing to these volumes, that account of his life and character, which his distinguished abilities, learning, and station, might give the publick reason to expect: But which the Doctor himself hath by his works rendered in some measure unnecessary. For every attentive Reader will from these infer, the uncommon *quickness* and *penetration* of his *judgment*, the large *variety* and *extent* of his *learning*, the *warmth* and *vigour* of his *imagination*, and his strong *attachment* to the cause of *rational piety*, *practical Christianity*, and *religious and civil liberty*: Which rendered him so *able a defender* of the Christian cause, so *instructive* and *animating a preacher*, so *successful a champion for liberty* and the protestant *Dissenters*, and so much an *honour* to them, as to give great reason to regret his death in the advanced age of Seventy-three, for its being a considerable loss to the learned and Christian world.

Dr. *Candler*, in consequence of a long and close application to the study of the best ancient *Greek* writers, historical, moral, and poetic, left in his *interleaved bible* a large number of *notes*, of great use for illustrating the language and sentiments of the sacred writers, especially of the *New Testament*. As these will do eminent honour to the Doctor's me-



mony, as a scholar and a critic, and prove of considerable service for explaining the sacred writings; some of his friends design soon to publish them. The Doctor also in his will expressed a concern, to have the principal of his works which he had then published, and which were grown out of print, reprinted in four volumes, octavo. The two first of these should contain his *Defences of Christianity* against *Collins, Morgan*, and others; to which will be made considerable additions from his M.S. the third his *Sermons*, and the fourth his *History of Persecution*. The price of the four volumes, 'tis computed, cannot be less than 20 shillings. They who are disposed to encourage this publication are desired to send in their names to the following Booksellers, Mr. BUCKLAND, in *Paternoster-Row*; Messrs. DILLY, in the *Poultry*, and Mr. WILLIAM DAVENHILL, in *Cornhill*; who will put the work to the press, as soon as a number of books are engaged for, sufficient to defray the expence of the impression.

Here the Editor intended to have *closed* his account of the character and writings of Dr. *Candler*; but some friends, for whose judgment he hath a deference, thinking that a more particular relation of the education and life of so eminent a person was expected by the publick, and would be acceptable; he collected, and has added the following brief memoirs.

Dr. *Candler* was descended from ancestors heartily engaged in the cause of *non-conformity*, and sufferers for the liberty of conscience. His  
Grandfather

# The P R E F A C E. vii

Grandfather *Chandler*, a tradesman at *Taunton* in *Somerset*, was much injured in his fortune by the persecutions under *Charles II.* but bore chearfully the spoiling of his goods, that he might preserve his peace of mind, and his title to the better and more enduring substance in *Heaven* inviolate.

His Father, the reverend Mr. *Henry Chandler*, was a dissenting minister of considerable worth and abilities, who spent the greater part of his ministerial life at *Bath*, where he maintained an honourable name. Mr. *Samuel Chandler* his elder Son, the subject of the present memoirs, was born at *Hungerford* in *Berks*, where his Father was then a Minister, A. D. 1693. Discovering early a genius for learning, it was cultivated with care, and he was placed under masters, with whom he made such improvements in classical learning, that few carry from the college so large a stock of this, and particularly of the *Greek*, as he was master of before he went to the academy.

Being determined for the ministry, he was first sent to an academy at *Bridgewater*, under the direction of the reverend Mr. *Moore*, whence he was soon removed to *Gloucester*, that he might be a pupil of the very learned and ingenious Mr. *Samuel Jones*, who had opened an academy in that city with great reputation, which he long supported. Mr. *Jones* being in the prime of life, and bent on advancing the character with which he set out, applied himself with uncommon care

and diligence to cultivate the minds of his pupils ; in which he was not a little animated by the distinguished geniuses of several of them ; one of whom was the famous Dr. Butler, who died Bishop of *Durham*, and another the late Archbishop of *Canterbury*. The emulation which such companions in study must excite, and the mutual light and assistance they would communicate, could not but greatly contribute to render Mr. Chandler richly furnished in the several parts of literature and science, to which he applied ; and particularly in *critical*, *biblical*, and *oriental* learning. And the acquaintance and friendship which then commenced, was continued with reciprocal instances of esteem and regard to the end of life, notwithstanding their different stations and engagements.

Mr. Chandler leaving the academy began to preach about July, 1714, and entering upon his sacred employments with such abilities, and these so well improved, was soon taken notice of ; and chosen to be their minister by the *Presbyterian* congregation at *Peckham*, near *London*, in 1716, and served them in the gospel of Christ with acceptance and reputation ; until he was called thence to minister to the Society in the *Old Jewry*, one of the most considerable churches in the city, of the *Presbyterian* denomination. While Mr. Chandler was employed at *Peckham*, some gentlemen, of the several denominations of Dissenters in the City, came to a resolution to set

set up and support a weekly evening lecture at the *Old Jewry*, for the winter half year ; the subjects treated in which were to be the *evidences* of *natural* and *revealed* religion, and *answers* to the principal *objections* urged against them : And they chose two of the most eminent young ministers in each denomination for executing this design. Of these Mr. *Candler* was one, and the very worthy Dr. *Lardner* another ; who has since made himself universally known and esteemed, by many very learned, judicious and impartial writings, in defence of the authenticity of the New Testament, and the truth of the Christian religion ; which will do him and the Dissenters great and lasting honour.

When this lecture was dropped, another of the same kind was set up, to be preached by one person ; it being judged, that it might be thus conducted with more consistency of reasoning, and uniformity of design : And Mr. *Candler* was chosen for this service. In the course of this lecture he preached some sermons on the confirmation which *miracles* gave to the divine mission of Christ, and the truth of his religion ; and vindicated the argument against the objections of *Collins* in his *Grounds and Reasons*, &c.

These sermons, by the advice of a friend, he threw into the form of a continued treatise, and printed. This work gained him high reputation, and made way for his being called upon the first vacancy to settle with the congregation in the *Old Jewry*, about the year



## The PREFACE.

1725; first as an *assistant*; and afterwards as their *pastor*. Here he ministered to the religious improvement and eternal felicity of an affectionate and generous people for Forty years, with an increasing and established reputation; which how well it was deserved, his discourses formerly and now printed sufficiently manifest. With what vigour, diligence and constancy of application, he also employed the time not taken up by the duties of his pastoral character, for improving himself and benefiting the world, may be learnt from the several writings he published on a variety of important subjects; a list of which is therefore subjoined.

Perhaps it may be of use to studious persons of tender constitutions to be informed, that Mr. *Chandler* in the younger part of life was subject to frequent and dangerous *fevers*; one of which confined him more than three months, and threatened by its effects to disable him for publick service. He was therefore advised to go into the *vegetable diet*, in which he continued for twelve years. This produced so happy an alteration in his constitution; that though he afterwards returned to the usual way of living, he enjoyed an uncommon share of vigour and spirits till Seventy.

Among other learned and useful designs which Mr. *Chandler* had formed, he began a *Commentary on the Prophets*. Having finished *Joel*, which he published, and gone a great way in *Isaiah*, he met with the M.S. Lex-  
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icon and Lectures of the famous *Arabic* Professor *Schultens*, who much recommends the explaining the difficult words and phrases of the *Hebrew* Language, by comparing them with the *Arabic*. This determined Mr. *Candler* to study the *Hebrew* anew, with this light before him, and to drop his Commentary 'till he should thus have satisfied himself, that he had attained the genuine sense of the sacred writers : And having once dropt it, a variety of other engagements prevented his resuming and finishing his original plan.

While he was thus employed in advancing the interests of religion, learning and liberty, he received the highest literary honour from two Universities, *Edinburgh* and *Aberdeen* ; who each of them sent him, unasked, the diploma of *Doctor in Divinity*.

Before I conclude these brief memoirs, I would mention two or three facts, which justice to the Doctor's memory will not allow me to omit. The *first* is, that the *Widows* and *Orphans* of poor dissenting ministers are greatly indebted to him for that fund which has relieved so many of their necessities. He first formed the design of it, and by his interest and applications engaged a number of gentlemen in the generous subscription, that laid the foundation on which this excellent charity has since risen to its present greatness : And to this fund he continued a zealous friend to the last. Two other facts I shall take leave to transcribe from the sermon preached after his funeral.

The

The *one* is, that the high reputation which he had gained, by his defences of the Christian religion, procured him from some of the governors of the established church, the offers of considerable preferments, which he nobly declined. He valued more than these the liberty and integrity of his conscience, and scorned for any worldly consideration to profess as divine truths, doctrines which he did not really believe, and to practice in religion, what he did not inwardly approve. An honourable sacrifice to truth and honesty, and well compensated by the affection and generosity of his people; as far as such sacrifices are recompenced on this side the grave.

The *other* fact which I would mention is this. When it had pleased God, during the last years of his life to visit him with frequent returns of a most painful disorder, he bore these with a *resignation* becoming the *faith* of a *Christian*, grew visibly more disengaged from temporal things, and often with warmth declared; that to secure the divine felicity promised by Christ, was the *principal* and almost the *only* thing that made life desirable. That to attain this he would gladly die, submitting himself intirely to God, as to the time and manner of death, whose will was most righteous and good: And being persuaded, that *all was well, which ended well for eternity.*

Thus Dr. Chandler closed a long, active and useful life, and we trust he is among the *dead who have died in the Lord, and are blessed;*  
*who*

*who rest from their labours, and whose works follow them.*

The editor, thankful to God, that amidst much ill health he has been able to bring this publication to a close, earnestly commends these discourses to the serious and attentive perusal of the pious and judicious, and to the divine blessing; praying that they may produce all those beneficial effects, for establishing their faith, improving their temper and conduct, and advancing their preparation for a blessed immortality, which the author designed, and which will add to his joy, and the splendor of his crown, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

T H O M A S A M O R Y.



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Calliodorii Senatoris Complexiones in Epistolas, Acta Apostolorum et Apocalypsin, e vetustissimis Canoniceorum Veronensium Membris nuper tractis. Editio altera ad Florentinam fideliter expressa, opera et cura Samuelis Chandleri. 1722. 12mo.

He also wrote the Life of Mrs. Mary Chandler, his Sister, inserted in the Lives of the English Poets; written by Theophilus Cibber, Robert Shields, and Others; in five vols. 12mo. for R. Griffiths. 1756.

Besides the preceding Discourses and Treatises, he wrote about Fifty Papers in a Weekly Publication, intitled, The Old Whig, or Consistent Protestant, in Defence of the Principles of civil and religious Liberty. 1735—1738.

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## S E R M O N I.

The Religion of Christ represented.

JOHN vii. 46.

*The Officers said : Never man spake  
like this man.*

**T**H E feast of tabernacles was one of those three solemnities, on which all the men in the whole country of Judea were to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem, there to offer up their sacrifices in the temple. As this feast was approaching, our Lord's brethren, or kinsmen, said to him : Go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest ; for there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. *i. e.* No man, who seeks to be acknowledged in any publick character, or to be universally received and believed in as a prophet, doth those works in a private obscure part of a country, on which the proof of such character, and prophetick office depends. *If thou do these things, if thou hast the power to do these miracles, shew thyself to the world, do them openly*

VOL. I.

B

at

at Jerusalem, when the whole nation is assembled there, that they may see them, and be convinced. But though our Lord did not choose to go up publickly with them to Jerusalem, yet he went soon after them in a more private manner; and in the midst of the feast he went into the temple, and openly taught his doctrine to the whole concourse of people assembled there. The effect of this was, that *many of the people believed on him, and said: When Christ cometh shall he do more miracles than these, which this Man hath done? When the Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, they were moved with envy and indignation, and together with the chief priests sent officers to apprehend him.* But his time was not yet come, and the officers instead of executing their commission, became themselves his admirers, and returned to the chief priests and pharisees without their prisoner; and upon being interrogated: *Why have ye not brought him? They answered in the words of my text: Never man spake like this man.* They were so charmed and struck with his doctrine, as that they had no power to apprehend him; but confessed, that as a teacher he was superior to all that went before him. And the more thoroughly the doctrine of our blessed Saviour is considered, the more abundantly it will appear, that this observation of the officers concerning him is true: *That never man spake like this man.* In explaining which words, I shall consider

## I. The

I. *The Nature of his Doctrine, or what he spake.*

II. *Shew you the peculiar and incomparable excellency of it.*

III. *Inquire what assistances and qualifications be had for it. And*

IV. *What Inference is to be drawn from hence, or the conclusion that naturally results from this superior excellency of Christ's doctrine, and the known circumstances of his Education and Life.*

I am to consider, *what it was that our blessed Lord spake, or the Nature of that doctrine which he taught, which rendered him the wonder and admiration of his enemies.* What the particular subject our Lord insisted on, when these officers heard him, was, cannot certainly be determined; though by the hint left by the apostle, it seems to have been that of the gift of the Holy spirit, which was to be communicated to those who should believe in him. For *in the last day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried: If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;* evidently referring to those words of *Isaiab:*\* *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters;* where the love and desire of truth, righteousness and salvation are compared to thirst; the doctrines and promises of the gospel to waters; the reception of these doctrines, and the belief of these promises to drinking; as our Lord explains the word, by adding: *He that believes in me, out of his belly*

\* *lv. 1.*



shall flow rivers of living waters; or as he saith to the Samaritan woman: *The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up to everlasting Life*†. He shall have within himself an eternal never failing source of purity, peace and joy; as though he had within himself a living spring of the purest water, continually flowing, to quench his thirst, and be his perpetual refreshment. Our blessed Lord, who took occasion from almost every occurrence, to inculcate his doctrine on the minds of his hearers, was led to this figurative discourse, from the practice customary on this feast of tabernacles, of drawing water from the fountain of *Siloah* in a golden pitcher, and when mixed with wine pouring it out upon the altar, as a libation to God. And as the gifts of the spirit are represented by water in several places of the Old Testament, our blessed Lord signified, that those who believed on him should receive this sacred gift in such a manner as should give them the utmost consolation, and be to their minds a sure earnest of eternal life and blessedness. And it seems by the context, that this was the subject on which our Lord discoursed, by which he so wrought on those who were sent to apprehend him, as that they could not persuade themselves to execute their warrant against so extraordinary and divine a teacher. And though we have but few, if any of our Saviour's discourses at full length, yet when

† John iv. 14.

the whole of his doctrine is considered, as contained in the short fragments that the *Evangelists* have transmitted down to us, it will appear altogether worthy of the character of a divinely commissioned teacher, and such as will make him appear infinitely superior to all other ministers that ever appeared in our world. Here let us consider briefly the *religion* and *morality* of our blessed Lord.

I. *The religion of Christ.* This is a matter of the utmost importance, and by which the pretensions of our blessed Lord to a divine commission may be easily decided. If in what he hath delivered on this head, there be any false representations of God, any wrong accounts of the nature of his worship, any thing substituted in the room of real piety, any appearing tincture of enthusiasm, any marks and rites of superstition, any thing unworthy of or unsuitable to the purity and dignity of God and true religion, this will furnish the strongest kinds of objections against all claims of a divine authority and commission, will weaken the credit of his character, and the foundation of our hope and faith in him, as the Messiah, Messenger and Saviour of God. Let us then consider

1. The account he gives of God his heavenly father, whom he constantly represents as the one true God. *This is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God* †. As supreme in majesty and perfection; *My Father is greater*

† John xvii. 3.

than all\*. As the origin and source of all his own mediatorial powers; *I live by the father, I do nothing of myself* ||; *as my father taught me I speak these things* †. The words that I speak unto you I speak not of my self; but the father that dwelleth in me he doth the works ‡. As supremely good. *Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God* §. And as the divine goodness is that attribute of God which we are most concerned to be established in, to encourage our repentance and return to him, our Lord hath given us the fullest and clearest account of it; representing him as continually kind in the common course of his providence to the evil and the good, to the just and the unjust\*\* ; as ever disposed to forgive us our trespasses |||, how numerous and aggravated soever, upon our sincere repentance, and application for mercy; even though we stand indebted for our 10000 talents ††; and though like prodigals we have wasted our substance, reduced ourselves to misery, and forfeited every regard of paternal compassion and goodness; and as so loving a sinful world, as that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life; sending him into the world not to condemn it, but that the world through him might be saved ††. In a word, the whole character of God, as given by our blessed Lord, is such as is every way suitable to his

\* John x. 29.

|| vi. 57.

† viii. 28.

‡ xiv. 10.

§ Mat. xix. 7.

\*\* v. 45.

||| xviii. 24.

†† Luke xv. 11

†† John iii. 16, 17.

infinite glory and majesty, and to his infinite compassion and mercy as the *Father* and *Friend* of mankind; so that he appears every way worthy of our holy reverence and fear, and our highest veneration, esteem and love! A description this, adapted to answer all the most valuable ends of practical religion, and to strengthen all the obligations to universal virtue and goodness; and therefore such as best suits the circumstances of mankind, and is of infinitely greater consequence to us, than the introducing any difficult abstruse metaphysical speculations in reference to the nature or perfections of God could have been, which minister to disputes, but have seldom if ever been friendly to the interest of real godliness and substantial morality.

2. Nor is the account delivered by our blessed Lord of the *nature and extent of providence*, less excellent and rational, than the doctrine he hath given us of God; extending it to the *fowls of the air*, and the *very lillies and grass of the field\**, the *height of our stature*, and the *very number of the hairs of our head*||; and more especially to the support and comfortable subsistence of life; man being in the estimation of God of much greater importance than all other creatures whatsoever. An account of providence this, worthy the immensity of his being, who is every where present, and the perfection of his knowledge, to whom all things are open; and agreeable to the dictates

\* Mat. vi. 26.

|| x. 29.



of sounder philosophy itself amongst some of the ancients, who acknowledged that providence extended to the minutest things, even to the leaves of the trees.

3. As to that article, in which almost all the world ran into the most shameful mistakes, the *worship of God*, he settled it upon an immoveable foundation of eternal truth, and with such evidence, as carries the fullest conviction to all that impartially consider it. *The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father* \*. i. e. when both temples shall be destroyed, and the particular kind of worship in them shall absolutely cease. *The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit* †, with pure affections, and the inward rational powers of their mind, in opposition to merely external rites and ceremonies; and *in truth*, with such worship as hath its foundation in the nature of things, is suitable to the majesty and perfections of God, and every way agreeable to his will, in opposition to the superstitions, idolatries, the false, absurd and impious rites and ceremonies of worship, that had so long and so universally obtained amongst all nations of the earth. *For the Father seeketh such to worship him* ‡. Such worshippers alone the Father seeks and approves; *for God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth*; our blessed Lord reducing in this short, but admirable directory, the

\* John iv. 21.

† iv. 23.

‡ v. 24.

worship of God to its original simplicity and primitive purity, and fixing it on such a foundation, as not to confine it to any particular place or nation, but as renders it capable of being performed every where alike, and in the same acceptable manner by all nations over the whole world. And agreeable to this general account, he declares, *that the first and great commandment is, that we should love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind* †; and this command is the *first* in nature, obligation and importance, insomuch that there can be no true religion without it, nor any service acceptable to God that doth not proceed from it. And as the providence of God is universal, reaches to every event of life, and never ceases its inspection and care, he recommends a constant trust in and dependance on him as an essential branch of true piety and religion, and the divesting ourselves of all those anxieties and cares, that argue a disbelief, or a real distrust of providence. Take no thought for the life, nor say: *What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed; for after all these things do the Gentiles seek* §. These are the main objects of their care, and employ their perpetual solicitude, as placing their principal happiness in them. Take you no such thought. Necessaries God will provide, for *your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of*

† Mat. xxii. 37.

§ vi. 25.

God, and his righteousness; the other things with a secondary inferiour submissive care, and all of them shall be added to you. And as trust in God's providence naturally produces and expresses itself by prayer, our blessed lord recommends it as an essential duty of religion, of continual use and perpetual obligation, and hath himself prescribed a short form, as a directory and model for the Christian church in all ages of the world.

4. And as the *example of God* himself is in many respects imitable by men, and wherever it is so infinitely worthy our imitation, hence our blessed Lord hath comprehended the whole of religion, in that short but admirable precept: *Be ye therefore perfect, as your father which is in Heaven is perfect.* And as the will of God is the directory and only sure rule of religion and worship, and obedience to his will is what we all owe without any reserve or exception, hence our blessed Lord frequently describes the whole of our duty to God, and the sum and substance of the worship that we are to pay him, by *keeping his commands, and doing his will*; because there is and can be no true worship of God without obedience, nor any acceptable worship other than what is agreeable to his will. And indeed we find nothing in all our blessed Saviour's doctrine on this head, but what is truly great and excellent, pure and simple, free from art and pageantry; nothing in favour of pompous rites and numerous ceremonies; nothing but what a reasonable mind will acknowledge the fitness of doing. So that  
there

there can be no exceptions taken against our Saviour's doctrine, as to the worship of God, but such as will equally hold good against all kind of worship and devotion ; and the thing that seems to be aimed at by the enemies of revelation, is not to exchange the worship of God appointed by Christ, for any other better scheme of it, but rather to banish all kind of worship from their houses and tables in private, and from the house and church of God itself in the publick assembly and congregation. But I may observe further,

5. His avowed *enmity* to all kinds of *superstition*, and the method he took to root out all the seeds of it in the minds of those he instructed. Thus he censured the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* for their long prayers, and condemned the *Heathens* for their vain repetitions †, as if they thought they should be heard for their much speaking †. In like manner he corrects the Jews for their extream *rigidness* in respect of the rest of the *sabbath* day, when they blamed him for the miraculous cures he performed on it, and for permitting the disciples to pluck the ears of corn when they were an hungred, as they passed through the corn fields ; and for their frequently *scrupulous washings* of their hands, their cups and their platters ; their refusing to converse with and come near to publicans and sinners, for fear of being defiled by touching them ; their nicety as to the *tythings* of *mint, anise and cummin* ; their regard to

† Mat. xxiii, 14.

† vi. 7.



*human traditions*, and the veneration they paid to the commandments of men, in things relative to the service and worship of God. The Scribes and Pharisees were extremely superstitious and rigid; and placed religion, not in purity of heart and sanctity of life, and obeying the prescriptions of God; but in certain external forms and observances, fastings and bodily severities, and an unprescribed traditional kind of sanctity, which was so far from promoting the great ends of rational religion, as that it frequently made void the commands of God, and dissolved the obligations of men to obey him. And 'tis observable, that our blessed Lord in a peculiar manner opposed himself to this generation of men, treated them with sharpness and contempt, and passed the severest censures on them; as having their superstitious principles and practices in the greatest abhorrence, because he knew them to be subversive of all true religion and morality. And it must be observed in honour of our blessed master's character, that in all the various doctrines he delivered, and the numerous precepts that he gave to his disciples, there is not a single one that can be named, that argues one mistaken principle of religion, or that enjoins any observance, which hath the least tincture of enthusiasm, or which tends to the encouragement of superstition. Let me add,

6. The *abhorrence* he shewed, in his doctrine, to all kind of *insincerity* and *hypocrisy*, in all things relating to God and his worship, how sincerely he rebuked it, and how frequently

quently he cautioned his disciples and hearers against it. 'Tis impossible to read those parts of his history which relate to this subject, without an inward veneration for the person, who discovered so strong a detestation for all religious dissimulation and guile, as boldly to reprove it in those of the highest character and office, and such a warm and generous love to integrity and truth. The Scribes and Pharisees made extraordinary pretences to sanctity, and to a godliness and devotion superior to all mankind. But 'twas all ostentation and pomp, mere outside and shew; whilst their tenets and characters were absolutely destitute of all true worth and goodness. But with what honesty and courage did our blessed Saviour expose these wretches, and their practices, and how excellent are those admonitions he gives to a secret humble modest piety †, in many instances to be known only to God, and never to be practiced out of ostentation, and desire of receiving praise from men. The Scribes and Pharisees made great pretensions to liberality; but unwilling to lose the honour of being esteemed for it, they gave notice of their *alms* by *sound of trumpet*, that they might receive glory of men. They pretended to great devotion, and in order to have the reputation of peculiar godliness, they prayed *standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of streets to be seen of men*, and lengthened out their prayers, for a *pretence to devour widows houses*. They put on

† Mat. vi. 1—5.

great austerity and shews of mortification, fasted frequently, and in order to be the more taken notice of put on penitential countenances, and *disfigured their faces*, or as the original word signifies, wholly divested themselves of, quite obscured their natural look, and that by an artificial moroseness and sadness of countenance; and as appears by the context, by a neglect of their persons, and an affected studied foulness and soil on their countenances, that every one might look on them as persons extremely mortified, and as it were macerated or pale, by their frequent fastings. But how just are our blessed Lord's censures of these practices, and how wise the instructions he gives in reference to them; recommending the *secrecy* of the *closet* for devotion and prayer to God, such an unaffected and concealed method of being benevolent and kind, as that *our left hand should scarce know what our right hand doeth*, and the concealment rather of our fasts and humiliations by anointing our head, and washing our face, *i. e.* appearing rather to feast than fast, instead of proclaiming it to others, that we are in a state of discipline and mortification.

Again, they pretended great zeal for God, and an high veneration for traditionary doctrines and rites; they *drew near to God with their mouths*, and *they honoured him with their lips*. But *still their heart was far from God*, and though they pretended to worship him, *they taught for doctrines the commandments of men*, and made the commands of God of none effect by their traditions. How worthy was such an iniquitous, false

false and deceitful practice, of the severest censure of one that came from God, and taught the doctrine of worshipping God in spirit and truth. Again, they *bound heavy burthens and grievous to be borne, and laid them on other mens shoulders* ||, i. e. when they taught others, they rigidly insisted on the most exact and punctual observance of the whole law of *Moses*, moral and ceremonial, and of their own traditionary rites and ceremonies; but they *themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*; a proverbial form of expression, in use among the *Hebrew, Greek and Roman* writers, to denote their refusing to take any part of this burthen on themselves when 'twas not for their interest; that they were so ready to slip their own shoulders from the burthen, as that they would not so much as touch it with the top of their fingers, when ever their convenience or advantage required it; so far were they from submitting to carry it themselves, even when they pressed the absolute necessity of others bearing it without mitigation or mercy. An instance this of the vilest hypocrisy, and that shewed the wickedness and falsehood of their hearts. It was from the same evil spirit, that *they made broad their phylacteries*, pieces of parchment, on which were written particular portions or passages of the law, which they bound on their foreheads and their arms, and *enlarged the borders of their garments*, not out of any peculiar regard to the law of *Moses*, but



to be seen and praised of men, and that these badges of sanctity, as they imagined them, might secure them the *uppermost rooms at feasts*, and the *chief seats in the synagogue*, that they might be called *Rabbi* and *Master*, and secure themselves dominion, power and wealth. They were zealous in making *profelytes*, but not to virtue and piety. They were extremely strict as to some oaths, but to others as important they paid no regard. *They tithed mint and anise and cummin*, but *judgment, mercy and faith*, those weightier matters of the law, they intirely neglected. They *cleansed the outside of their vessels*, but *within were full of extortion and excess*. They *built and garnished the tombs and sepulchres of their righteous men and prophets*, out of a pretence to an high veneration for their memories and characters; but their *hearts*, like those sepulchres, *were full of corruption and rottenness*. In a word, they were, as to their outward appearance as to men, exceedingly *righteous*, but *within they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity*. Had our blessed Lord accommodated his doctrines to the prejudices of these men; and courted their friendship by indulging their vices, and flattering their pride, vanity, and lucrative dispositions, he had secured them all to his own interest, he might have risen by their means to be the temporal Messiah and King of *Israel*; or at least would have been in a condition to have had a fair trial for it, and pushed his success by force of arms. But how just was his displeasure, how strong his indignation against these men and their practices.

practices. How boldly did he reprove and reproach them for these hypocritical practices, and tell them that notwithstanding all their external appearances of sanctity, they were in reality *a generation of vipers, and could not escape the damnation of hell.*

In a word, the whole conduct and doctrine of our blessed Saviour manifests an irreconcilable enmity to all falsehood and deceit in the great article of religion, and one ardent tendency of his instructions was, to promote that *truth* and *sincerity* of heart, without which the most specious professions, and splendid appearances of devotion and piety are of no manner of worth and value in themselves, can never be acceptable to God, nor of any kind of advantage to those who practice and place their dependence on them. And this leads me to observe farther, that the *great terms* of mens *acceptance* with God, and being intitled to his favour, as laid down by our blessed Saviour, are such as arise out of the nature of things themselves, must be immutably true, such as must take place in every religious institution that is from God, and cannot be superseded by any positive command whilst God remains what he is, and men retain their natural dependence on and relations to him. And one would think that there could never have been any considerable mistakes on this important article, or that those who have had a free use of their reasonable powers, could not have been at a loss with themselves to determine, on what their

interest in the divine friendship necessarily depended. But both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, as to the body of them were grossly mistaken, and had the most pernicious and corrupted sentiments on these articles. The *Jews* imagined, that their being *Abraham's* posterity, their *circumcision* in the flesh, their having *Moses* his law, their zeal for his ritual, and their punctual compliance with lesser external ceremonial prescriptions, would without any other considerations be their security from the divine displeasure, and for their perpetually remaining the peculiar, chosen, favourite people of God. And in like manner the *Gentiles* laid the great stress on their *gifts* and *offerings*, their *temples* and *sacrifices*, in honour of their Gods, and indeed on every thing almost, except those which are essential to mens acceptance with the true God, and their happiness in his approbation and love. But our Saviour hath corrected every possible mistake on this head, and hath settled this great article of religion on such a foundation, and with that full evidence and clearness, as that it can never be reasonably disputed or denied. And these terms, as fixed by him are, *faith* in God with all its connected graces, *repentance* upon the account of past sins, and a *sincere uniform constant obedience* to God for the future.

The *firm belief* of religious principles is the foundation of every thing that is sacred, and the mind destitute of the knowledge of these principles, or void of the benefit of them, must want one part of its principal ornament,

one thing necessary to its approbation by the God of truth; especially as without this knowledge and belief, all those inward dispositions, in which the moral rectitude of the mind consists, will be intirely absent; it being impossible, that those inward sentiments and good affections towards God, in which the very essence of true piety consists, can ever take place, either where there is no proper knowledge of God, or where his being, perfections and providence are questioned and denied. And if the works of creation make sufficient discoveries of God, to all that will with due attention of mind observe them, and are abundantly sufficient to produce in all reasonable minds a strong conviction, *that God is*, and that he is *infinitely powerful, wise, and good*; it must be the intention of God in our formation, that we should see and submit to the evidence that he hath given us, and in consequence of it acknowledge his being and perfections. And for men thus circumstanced to talk of *belief* as *free*, and incapable of being forced, is to say something that is indeed true in itself, but impertinent as urged by them; because belief is not so free, as that we are in all cases left at liberty to believe or not, or to believe just as our passions or inclinations leads us; and though belief *cannot be forced* without evidence, and there can be no sin in not believing without or contrary to conviction, yet if the evidence offered be such as is enough to satisfy and convince *honest* minds, those that remain unsatisfied and unconvinced with that evidence



must want integrity of mind, and their infidelity thus far must be really criminal and immoral. And therefore wherever God is pleased to give this *sufficiency of Evidence* for the truth of principles, he may justly command the belief of them; because this is only to command that integrity of heart which he hath always a right to insist on; or that men should impartially consider the evidence of truth which he hath set before them, and lay aside all those prejudices and wrong affections, which may prevent the access of truth to their minds, or hinder them from submitting to the proof that attends it. And therefore faith in God, and in any revelation that he hath made of himself, is justly required as one of the necessary terms of Salvation in the favour and acceptance of God, because the proofs of his being and perfections are every where, and always present to mankind; and because every revelation from God, to whomsoever it is given, must carry along with it the evidence of its own truth and divine original, as it would otherwise be incomplete, and absolutely insufficient to answer the only end of its being given; viz. its being believed and submitted to by those who were to receive it. And this belief is with the greater reason insisted on, because the influence of it depends on the reception we give it, and because whatever be the intention of God in granting it, this can never be secured without believing it. And indeed there is nothing more absurd and irrational, than to make the commands to believe the

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the Gospel an objection against the truth of it ; because if it be a divine revelation, 'tis impossible it should be given without God's intending that men should believe it, or that if he did intend that they should believe it, he should not give sufficient evidence of the truth of it ; or that if he hath given such sufficient evidence he should not require their submission to it ; or that if he doth require it, he should not tell them so, and positively command it. And when the principles of truth are sought after with integrity of mind, clearly discerned, and treasured up in a good and honest heart, they are a natural recommendation of a rational being to the God of truth, and cannot but be discerned by him with approbation and complacency.

But the belief of truth, however important in itself, is not all that is necessary to secure the friendship of God, and especially to restore sinners to a state of peace and reconciliation with him. Sin, which implies disobedience of life, proceeding from enmity of heart to God, is the forfeiture of his favour, and renders men obnoxious to his displeasure. And whilst men continue in this state of disaffection and opposition to God, the supreme Governor of the world, and in an habitual violation of his laws by wickedness and vice ; 'tis not all the external purgations and purifications that they can make use of, that can wash away their stains, and render them clean in the sight of God ; nor all the most costly sacrifices they can offer, or that can be offered for them,

that can take away their guilt, or make atonement for their sins. Here can be no remedy without *repentance*, no regaining the favour of God but by *conversion and reformation*, or in the scripture language, by *becoming new creatures*, as to our moral characters, temper and behaviour. Hence our blessed Saviour was a *preacher of repentance*\*, declared the necessity and acceptableness of it, encouraged men to it, and assured them *they should perish without it* §, and that it was of great benefit to them, and that the repentance of every sinner caused *great joy amongst the Angels of God in Heaven* itself ||; hereby making repentance indispensibly and universally necessary to obtain mercy and salvation, and this is the more remarkable, in that our blessed Lord knew, that he was designed by his Heavenly Father as the great sacrifice of atonement and *propitiation for the sins of the world*, and that the offering he was to make of himself would answer every end that could be attained by any propitiatory sacrifice. And therefore his preaching the doctrine of repentance, as universally necessary for sinners was declaring, in the strongest manner, that even his blood would not cleanse the *impenitent* sinner, that his death would be no kind of satisfaction for the guilt of obstinate and incurable offenders, nor his merits ever shelter them from the condemnation of God, and the destructive consequences of their crimes.

\* Mark i. 15.

§ Luke xiii. 3.

|| xv. 7.

And inasmuch as no sorrow or remorse for past sins is of any worth and avail, without *fruits meet for repentance*, and unless it be productive of an intire change of temper and conduct, and a future life of uniform regular constant piety and virtue; hence our blessed Lord hath made *constancy and resolution and continued patience in our Christian faith and virtue*, universally and unalterably necessary to acceptance and salvation; and hath expressed this in so strong a manner, as hath given offence and distaste to some, who would have known better had they had a little more knowledge and learning, and impartiality enough to judge of words not by the sound, but the sense and customary usage of them. Thus our blessed Lord declares, that *if any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple* ||. If candor and equity, and a regard to the common rules of interpretation, were allowed to determine the sense of this place, men would naturally conclude the meaning to be; that fidelity to Christ, and constancy in religion and virtue must take place of all other considerations whatsoever; and that when these interests interfere, and we cannot act agreeable to the dictates of natural affection, and enjoy the comforts of relative society, and preserve life itself, without betraying our principles, renouncing our religion, and disobeying

|| Luke. xiv. 26.



God ; we must renounce all regards to our nearest relations, and even life itself, adhere to God, and maintain our integrity and Christian profession, whatever we lose or suffer for the sake of it.

As to the nature of the expression, though some Christian criticks have censured it, as not agreeable to the usual meaning of the words in Greek writers, when *bating* is put by the Evangelists for *loving less*, yet they are mistaken ; for we have an instance of exactly the same form of speech, and the same sense of the words, in one of the most polite and celebrated writers of *Greece*, when she was most renowned for the elegance and purity of her language, even in *Euripides* himself ; who hath this expression : That when two things offer themselves to our choice, he who *applies his mind* to the one *bates* the other †, the word *bates* being in the original the same with that made use of by the Evangelist ; which plainly demonstrates that 'twas a proverbial expression, signifying that no man can equally mind two contrary things, but by choosing one, rejects the other, and acts by it as he would do if he really hated it. And as to the *sentiment*, which is convey'd to us, that of renouncing all the dearest considerations of life, and even life itself, when we cannot retain them with honour, without renouncing truth and our fidelity to God ; though *modern philosophy* be too squeamish and delicate to digest it, *antient phi-*

† *Apud J. Stob. p. 36. l. 20.*

losophy had strength enough of constitution to endure it, and saw and owned the reasonableness, truth and dignity of it. I could parallel the sentiment by many passages from the ancients. Let one suffice from *Cicero* || the Roman Orator, whose judgment in this case is the most express. "He who deprives another of his property, and secures his own advantage by injuring another, is more an enemy to nature than death, poverty or grief, or any other accidents that can happen to the body, or our external circumstances. Justice, liberality and greatness of mind are more agreeable to nature, than pleasure, than life and riches, and to despise these things, and esteem them as of no value, in comparison with the publick utility, is an argument of a noble and generous mind : and if any one thinks that death, poverty, grief, the loss of children, relations and friends is less to be avoided than doing wrong, he is mistaken thus to imagine that any injury of fortune can be more grievous than the vices and disorders of the mind." The very doctrine of our Saviour, that a right behaviour, a good conscience, and the maintaining our integrity, is preferable to all worldly considerations, and should be persevered in at the hazard of every other interest whatsoever. These are the terms of acceptance with God, as fixed by our blessed Saviour ; faith, repentance and constancy in the profession of true religion and virtue; and they are

terms that reason dictates, and revelation confirms, and which shew the excellency of our blessed Saviour's doctrine, and that 'tis worthy of being acknowledged as a revelation from God. But farther,

7. Let us take a view of the *peculiar* and *special motives*, which he offered to mankind, to engage them to embrace and submit to the religion he taught, and become his genuine disciples by principle and practice. And these are every way suitable to the nature of his doctrine, and of equal weight and dignity with his precepts; all derived from the most interesting objects, and capable of making the deepest and most lasting impressions on our minds.

As our blessed Lord came into the world to recover men from those corruptions and vices, under the power of which they had been so long and miserably enslaved, and to reconcile them to God by the belief and love and practice of true religion, and to call them to the most eminent and exalted duties of piety and godliness; his mission must have been wholly ineffectual, and his doctrine have found no reception in the world, had he not been commissioned and authorised to assure men, that the most happy consequences should attend their becoming his disciples, and reward their sincerity in believing and obeying his gospel. Unprofitable truth will have but few votaries, and religion, when not conducive to happiness, will want its most powerful charms, and make but few conquests over the hearts  
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and affections of mankind. Happiness is what all aim at, and every thing that doth not afford some prospect of it will appear of little consequence, and to deserve but a small share in our regard. And therefore that christianity might want nothing necessary to recommend itself to mankind, nor the character of our Lord appear in any single instance defective, he was commissioned to give men the *promises* and *assurances* of the *most substantial blessings*; that so they might be led by the considerations of their own welfare and interest, to embrace a religion that was thus calculated for their advantage, and in the whole of it tended to promote their highest and noblest happiness. The encouragement he promised to repentance was *mercy and forgiveness* from God, declaring that *God had given him power to forgive sins* §; and to assure men of it in consequence of their forsaking them; an assurance of unspeakable benefit to us, and necessary to persuade sinners to consider seriously of their ways, to cherish the purposes of repentance, and to fix and strengthen the resolutions of a new life and better obedience for the future. As he exhorted men to believe in him, and receive him as the messenger of God his father, he assured them that he would bring them into a state of the *most perfect liberty*, that they should have *power to become the children of God*, and that they should be united to his heavenly Father by the tie of a perpetual friendship, and as

§ Mat. ix. 6.

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the proof of it should receive that blessed *spirit of God*, which should be in them a principle of truth, holiness and comfort. And as he made constancy in his religion universally necessary to share the benefits of it, he proposed the noblest rewards to render his disciples steadfast and immoveable, and make them superior to all the motives that could be offered to them, and to dissuade them from their adherence to continuance in his doctrine, giving them the promise in his Father's name of the *most glorious Resurrection*, and of their being made partakers of *eternal life and glory*. In all these promises there is such an apparent *dignity*, as renders them worthy of God; such a *purity* as that they are most perfectly suited to the nature of religion; and the blessings contained in them are of that *substance and value*, as that 'tis impossible we can receive any greater offers, or religion be attended with any more valuable or lasting advantages. *Heaven* itself is revealed to us by him, in all its joys and glories, and *eternity* is added to perpetuate and render perfect the felicity that must arise from the possession of it.

But then as the various dispositions of men are to be wrought on by various methods of application, and as some are more easily to be wrought on by their *fears* than their *hopes*, and as all constitutions of government are weak and insecure without the aid of proper penalties, hence our blessed Lord was commissioned by his heavenly Father to warn men against the consequences of infidelity and vice,  
and

and acquaint them with the nature of those *punishments* that must hereafter take place, as the fruit of incurable impenitency and obstinacy in sin; punishments on the one hand as awful, as the rewards promised on the other are encouraging; declared to be in their effects *everlasting and unchangeable*; from which the power of God will not, and the power of any created beings cannot possibly relieve them; a circumstance of punishment in a future state that arises out of mens natures. For as their rational principle within them is properly immortal, so if they have contracted a fixed dissimilitude to God, hatred of his government, and incapacity for enjoying him, and relishing the pleasures of a rational, divine and heavenly life; the necessary result is, all that inconvenience and misery that flows from the forfeiture of the divine favour, and a perpetual exclusion from his heavenly kingdom and glory. And this not arising merely from arbitrary pleasure, and the voluntary connection that God hath made, but from the constitution and necessity of things themselves; it being impossible that minds disaffected to God can take any pleasure in him, or that the indisposed to all the sacred services and enjoyments of the heavenly world can ever be made happy by being admitted to participate and share in them, that purity should ever unite in friendship with pollution, guilt be happy in the presence of him against whom it hath offended, or that God should approve or take complacency in those that are in their nature  
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and character a contradiction to his perfection and rectitude; or that there can be any thing else but the most substantial misery where persons render themselves incapable of delighting in, and deriving their happiness from him, who is the most excellent of all beings, and from whose favour and friendship must flow all the various blessings and enjoyments that are essential to our happiness, and the continuance of it.

But besides these motives to repentance, faith and steady constancy in Christian piety and virtue, that arise from the divine promises and threatenings, and the sanctions of everlasting rewards and punishments; there are a variety of others arising from the *character* and *mediation* of our blessed Lord himself, which cannot but have their due influence and weight upon all well disposed minds who duly weigh and rightly consider them, as they are in themselves adapted to the most active powers of our nature, and to awaken and bring into exercise those affections which have great influence in fixing our resolutions, settling our habits, and determining the conduct of our lives.

1. The great *humiliation* of the Son of God, in being *made flesh*, *emptying himself* of his original glory and riches, and in *becoming poor* and a *man of sorrows* for our sake, and submitting to all the inconveniences of our mortal state, that he might recover us from sin, and bring us back to our allegiance to and happiness in God, is a consideration that shews the

the great misery of our condition as sinners, demonstrates the necessity of our repentance and conversion, shews the vast importance of the divine favour to our happiness, and argues the mercy and compassion of God, and his gracious purposes of accepting us upon our returning to him, and compliance with the great intention of his Son's manifestation in the flesh.

2. The *example* of our blessed Lord, in his absolute obedience to his heavenly Father, his perfect purity and unblemished rectitude of conduct, in the exercise of the most excellent dispositions of mind, and practice of all the most difficult substantial duties and virtues of human life, shews the necessity of our conformity to him, the method and way by which we must approve ourselves to God, and is an encouragement to us to tread in his steps, and imitate as nearly as we can the divine pattern he hath set before us.

3. His *sufferings and death* carry in them various motives of the strongest nature to all ingenuous minds, to a perpetual adherence to him by faith, holiness and universal virtue. As he voluntarily submitted to them upon our account, *gratitude* should put us upon inquiring, what could be the end of this scene of affliction, suffering, shame and death? And when we learn, what 'twas to *redeem us from this evil world, and from all iniquity, and to purify us to himself a peculiar people*, that we should be *zealous of all good works*, how just is the conclusion we should draw from hence,  
of



of hearing his voice, submitting to the powerful persuasives of his love, and of complying with the design of all his sufferings, by *glorifying God with our souls and bodies, which are his.* Besides the motives that arise from the consideration of his death, as a *propitiatory sacrifice* for the sins of men, are very powerful and affecting; as hereby the evil of sin appears legible in the strongest characters, in the nature of the atonement made for it, as it demonstrates how difficult the reconciliation of sinners to God was, since it was not to be accomplished by any method of propitiation less than one made by the sacrifice of the son of God; as it shews the impossibility of their escape from the vengeance of God, who have no portion or share in the advantages arising from it, and as it is the surest pledge of the reconcilable forgiving nature of God, and his fixed disposition and resolution to forgive us all our past offences, if we will be persuaded to a timely repentance for them, and at length return to our subjection and duty to him.

4. How powerful a motive to sincerity and constancy in Christian piety and holiness, is the consideration of *Christ's resurrection from the dead*, as it shews him to be the *Son of God with power*, as 'tis an abundant confirmation of his divine character and commission, as it establishes the truth of his whole gospel, as it assures us that the terms of salvation declared by him are a really divine establishment, as it demonstrates the *possibility and truth* of the doctrine of the *universal resurrection*, as it establishes

establishes our faith in and expectation of the promised recompence of life and immortality, and thus carries in it the most powerful motive that can be offer'd, patiently to continue in well doing, and to abide immoveably in the faith and hope of the gospel.

5. The character of our blessed Saviour as *advocate* and *intercessor* at the right hand of God his heavenly Father, carries in it great encouragement, and a very powerful motive to continue steadfast in our profession even to the end; since the very end of his appointment to such a benevolent and friendly office must be, to secure us against every possible suspicion of God's being irreconcilable, prone to anger, and ready to take vengeance; and to be an eternal memorial to mankind, that he waits to be gracious, and will take pleasure in shewing mercy, and giving to all that ask it, *grace to help them in every time of need*†. And therefore 'tis an invitation to men to come boldly to the throne of grace, to offer their spiritual sacrifices to the Father of mercies, to cherish the hope of receiving from him all needful supplies, to place their affections on that blessed world where their Saviour and Lord lives, as their all powerful advocate, and to cherish the ambition of seeing him as he is, dwelling with him in that world, and sharing in the glories of his kingdom.

6. And lastly, his appointment to the solemnity of the *future judgment*, and to determine

† Heb. iv. 16.

by his impartial sentence the final condition of the whole rational creation for everlasting life or death, according to the nature of their actions, and their settled dispositions for happiness or misery, is a motive of the first importance and weight to Christian piety, and a steady perseverance in the work of the Lord; and at the same time one of the most comfortable and reviving considerations, that can enter into the heart of man. *If we must all stand at the judgment seat of Christ*, and every one before that impartial tribunal give an account of himself; *Oh what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!* How diligent that we be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless! and though the sense of our numerous imperfections, and in how many things we come short of and act contrary to our duty, may well overspread our minds with an holy awe, when we consider the nature and consequences of this important transaction; yet what *comfort* doth it inspire, what *cheerful hope* doth it revive in the breast, when we reflect by whom this important transaction is to be conducted: Not by God appearing in person, in all the substantial glories of his eternal Majesty, not by an Angel, who can know nothing or but little of the natural necessary weaknesses and frailties of our imbodied state; not by an haughty, arbitrary, severe, unrelenting inexorable man, appointed to sit in judgment over us. No, but by a *Man* who hath the *fullness of deity* in him to qualify him for the work, who hath all the

*sentiments*

*sentiments* of generosity, tenderness and compassion peculiar to *human* nature, who hath been in a *tempted state* himself, and hath thereby learnt to pity those who have been subject to temptation; who hath approved his *friendship* to mankind by the most substantial instances, and is himself constituted judge of the whole world for this purpose amongst others; that he may restore his faithful disciples and subjects to life, acknowledge and approve their fidelity, and adjudge them to an actual participation of those rewards, which God in his infinite and unmerited goodness hath laid up in heaven for them that believe and obey the gospel of his Son; reflections these that take off from the terrors of this awful event, reconcile us to the thoughts of it, and under the sense of all our repented and forsaken errors of temper and conduct bid us hope for mercy, and naturally and powerfully encourage us to expect it. And if we consider all these various motives together, arising from the several doctrines and the peculiar constitution of Christianity, and how they all aid and support one another, and conspire to carry on one and the same end, our reconciliation, conformity and obedience to God, and in consequence of this, our final and compleat happiness in him; they will be acknowledged as the most worthy and efficacious in their nature, and as having in them all that influence and force upon the minds and consciences of men, as scarce leave persons, in the hours of serious reflection, the liberty and power of



resisting them; but by their mighty and yet gentle constraints effectually draw, all who sincerely believe and attend to them, to that willing compliance with the great design of the gospel grace, which opens their minds to the peace of God in the present world, and fits them for the substantial blessedness and glory of a more durable and happy one.

In this view of the gospel religion, it may well be stiled *the power of God to the salvation of men*, or that powerful means which God hath instituted to bring men to knowledge, holiness and salvation. *If*, says the Apostle, *our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost* \*. If it doth not appear an institution worthy of God, and in all respects adapted to promote the salvation of men, it must be because they are in such a state as necessarily exposes them to final perdition. And it is certain, that if men remain destitute of the principles of religion, 'tis not because of any defect in the Gospel doctrine, which teaches men whatever is necessary to be known in order to their duty and happiness. If they remain impenitent and unreformed, enemies to religion and virtue, reprobate to all good works, and strangers to the spirit, life and power of godliness; 'tis not because the gospel is destitute of proper arguments and motives to influence and move them, but because they *will not attend* to them and *believe* them. Nothing can be added to the encouragements, persuasions and argu-

\* 2 Cor. iv. 3.

ments that Christ hath offered to our consideration. If these do not prevail with us, no others can, for no other can equal or exceed them. And if we remain unpersuaded, if our hearts will not relent, nor our obstinacy in vice, yield to these sovereign remedies, our state is incurable, and nothing can prevent our final ruin. How careful therefore should we be to understand our principles, to be apprised of their true excellency, and to impress on our hearts and consciences all the various motives that are held up to our consideration; that by the light of knowledge in our minds, purity of affection and disposition in our hearts, and all the substantial fruits of holiness and virtue in our lives; we may be here partakers of that hope in and peace of God which passeth all knowledge, and may hereafter be put into full and perpetual possession of all those heavenly and incorruptible blessings, which God hath reserved for them that love him, in his eternal Kingdom and Glory.

## S E R M O N II.

## A View of CHRISTIAN MORALITY.

JOHN vii. 46.

*The Officers said : Never man spake  
like this man.*

II. **H**AVING thus considered the doctrine of our blessed Saviour in reference to religion, I now come to take a view of what he taught and said with regard to morality; which as it is of the greatest consequence in itself, to the peace of the world, and the happiness of mankind, so it will very much tend to determine our Lord's character, and be one rule by which we may certainly judge, of the nature of his doctrine, and by consequence of the truth and reasonableness of his pretensions to a divine character and mission. For as false principles, and superstitious practices in religion, can never make part of a revelation that is truly from God; so neither can a scheme of loose and corrupted morals, a scheme that leads to vice, and tends to encourage and make men easy in their sins, ever have that God for its author, who is pos-  
sessed

nessed of the most perfect rectitude of nature, and necessarily abhors whatever is contrary and repugnant to it.

When we speak of *morality*, we mean that part of our conduct which relates to the right regulation of *ourselves*, and a suitable and proper deportment towards *others*; in order to distinguish it from such actions as are purely religious, or from that part of our behaviour which immediately respects the blessed God. This indeed is a very limited and therefore incomplete sense of the word *morality*, which in its proper and full signification comprehends the whole of our conduct as rational beings, towards all objects to which we bear any proper relation, God, as well as man; the word *morals*, or *morality*, signifying no more than *manners*; or the actions of men as reasonable and free agents. So that in the full latitude of the word, *morality* denotes the whole course of our actions, whether religious or virtuous, whether respecting God, our neighbour, or ourselves. And in this comprehensive sense we frequently use the word. Thus we speak of the ten commandments, as a summary of the moral law, that law which relates to our behaviour to God and man; comprised in two tables, the one containing our duty to God, and the other that part of our duty which respects men.

But as religion and morality have been generally spoken of as distinct from each other, the one considering our relations and duties to God, the other those we stand in and owe to



our fellow creatures, I now therefore consider morality, as taught by our blessed Saviour in this latter sense, and as only comprehending those duties, which as reasonable beings we owe to one another, and which arise out of our beings, and are inseparable from those connections into which we are brought by nature and providence, the obligations of which can never cease, 'till we lose or alter our very frames, and cease to be any longer members of society. And if we consider the *morality* inculcated by our blessed Lord, we shall find it the most worthy and exalted, that ever was delivered to mankind, and such as became the character of one that was sent from God. For

Our blessed Lord hath *extended* his *morality* to its full latitude, and taken into his scheme of it every thing that belongs to the subject, and can tend to render it compleat in itself, and make it an acceptable service to God. And this will appear if we consider

1. That he hath extended it to the *heart*, and the *inward affections* and *dispositions*. Actions may be as to the matter of them exceeding commendable and good, and yet have no manner of virtue and moral excellency in them; yea may argue the doers of them to be extremely wicked and profligate. Men may be sober and temperate out of mere prudence, to prolong life, to secure their health, and pursue their secular business with greater application and diligence. They may put on great shews of friendship and respect, merely  
to

to ingratiate themselves with others, and gain their good opinion only to deceive them, and make their market of their easiness and credulity. They may be liberal only for vain glory, popular applause, or view of private interest, without any thing of real generosity and benevolence in their breasts. They may do many actions that have all the appearance of virtue, for certain mean and even bad purposes, whilst the habits of the contrary vices are in full power, and retain their dominion over them. When this is the case, such actions want the principal circumstance to recommend them, have nothing of real and substantial goodness in them, and can't be any ways acceptable to God, who well knows all the secret motives that give rise to them, and can never approve them, but when they proceed from right dispositions. And therefore our Lord's rules of morality reach to the inward frame and temper, and require that the heart itself be good, and the internal dispositions from whence they flow be upright and commendable. Thus our Lord pronounces, *blessed the pure in heart* †, men whose inward passions and affections, whose aims and motives are sincere and uncorrupt, free from guile, hypocrisy and wickedness. And in his reproof of the Pharisees he bids them *make the tree good, and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt* ‡. i. e. The fruit can't be good from a bad tree, nor the fruit

† Mat. v. 8.

‡ xii. 33.

bad from a good tree. Such as the heart is, such will the fruit and actions be, and therefore *a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, as an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.* Hence he commands the mortification of all bad affections and habits, and the utter suppression of all criminal tendencies and dispositions. Thus he pronounces *a woe* upon the hypocritical scribes and pharisees §, because they made clean the outside of the cup and the platter, whilst they were within full of extortion and excess †; and commands them; *Cleanse first that which is within the cup and the platter, that the outside of them may be clean also ‡*; plainly shewing that if their hearts were pure and free from all criminal affections, their lives would be as free from the blemish of all wilful and presumptuous sins. In Christ's morality it is not sufficient that men abstain from all outward acts of violence and cruelty, but even the tendency to immoderate anger, all unreasonable resentments, all causeless wrath and passion must be regulated and subdued. 'Tis not enough to preserve ourselves from all the grosser acts of sensuality and impurity, Criminal desires must be extinguished, and all unhal- lowed inclinations extirpated out of our breast, and never be allowed to harbour, never be cherished and indulged within us. On the contrary, all the sacred dispositions of virtue and goodness must be cultivated, improved

§ Mat. xxiii. 25. † 26. ‡ v. 21.

and strengthened, in us, such as *poverty of spirit*, or great humility; *meekness*, or the calm, unrelenting dispassionate spirit ||; *mercifulness*, or the disposition to pity and compassion; chastity in imagination and thought; the most universal benevolence and good will, even *love to enemies*, a readiness to forgive them, and even a willingness to return them good for evil, when consistent with prudence, and if it may be any means of curing their enmity, and regaining them to their duty. In a word, there is not a single bad habit, that hath any countenance or favour shewn it by the morality of Christ, nor any one great and good and excellent disposition, that can belong to, or adorn human nature, that is not comprehended within the extensive rules he hath laid down in reference to it.

2. As he hath thus extended it to the heart and all the inward passions and affections of it, so he hath likewise to our *conversations* †, the *words* we speak, and the discourses we enter into with mankind. The nature and habitual course and tendency of a man's converse certainly forms part of his moral character, and bespeaks somewhat of the temper that governs and influences him. I know there are some, who are not guilty of all the vices they sometimes talk and boast of, and who dare not be as profligate and vile as they represent themselves, and seem to be desirous that others should think them. And though

|| Mat. v. 3.

† xii. 35.



what such persons say is not always a proof of their being always chargeable with the crimes they appear to glory in; yet as they seem willing to have the reputation of being desperately wicked, it seems to prove that they would be so in fact if they durst, and had not some strong and overbearing terrors and fears, that will not permit them to gratify their inclinations. At least it demonstrates, that they have not heartily fallen out with the vices of mankind, nor taken up that fixed abhorrence of them, which is essential to a virtuous character; because if this were the case, instead of being fond of appearing more wicked than they are, they would count every imputation of vice a scandal and reproach upon themselves, and shun the crime and the being thought guilty of it, as the greatest infamy and dishonour. And besides, it fixes on them the charge of falshood and lying, and thereby shews them to be persons of the meanest and most despicable character. And undoubtedly, whatever be the habitual manner of any person's conversation, it must evidently proceed from somewhat of a fixed answerable disposition; according to that certain infallible rule of our blessed Saviour: *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh* †. And therefore in his account, men's words are of that consequence, as that he expressly declares, *that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment*; which

† Mat. xiii. 36.

expression,

expression, though it certainly is not to be understood of every word, that is not intended to answer some immediately good purpose, much less which some severe and rigid people may censure as vain and idle; but primarily denotes an empty, sophistical, false way of reasoning, that hath no weight or truth in it; yet certainly proves that men are accountable to God for their words as well as actions; especially as our blessed Lord immediately adds: *For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned* \*; i. e. these shall be considered as well as actions in the future judgment, and have their share in determining our future state, and the sentence of absolution or condemnation, that shall finally be passed upon every one of us. And therefore upon this very principle our blessed Lord in his sermon on the mount, not only condemns causeless anger, but assures us, that *whosoever shall say to his brother Raca, shall be in danger of the Council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of Hell fire* §; i. e. for all their opprobrious, reviling, cruel and censorious speeches, they throw out in the warmth and heat of their passion, they shall receive a proportionable punishment from God. And this determination is agreeable to the truth of the case, and the reason of things; because as words argue the prevailing state and disposition of men, and the greatest consequences often depend on them, and much good

\* Mat. xii. 37.

§ v. 22.

or evil frequently arises out of them; they are for this reason cognizable in their nature, and cannot be overlooked at that impartial tribunal, where the judgment shall be in all respects according to truth, and nothing that determines men's moral characters and state shall be overlooked, and passed by without the proper notice and censure. Hence we find many excellent instructions and cautions given us in the Apostolick writings concerning these subjects, which as christians we ought not to disregard. *Fornication and all uncleanness and covetousness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh Saints, neither filthiness nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient* †; i. e. by a frequent figure, which are extremely indecent and unbecoming. The foolish talking mentioned by the apostle properly denotes, that sort of talk that was used by parasites and flatterers, who entered into all the follies and vices of the rich and great, and said as they said, and commended and countenanced the grossest indecencies of conversations, and appeared pleased and delighted with every thing they spoke, though ever so repugnant to the rules of virtue and good manners. And what the Apostle calls jesting denotes rather, and would have been better rendered by *scurrility*; pointing out those impertinent and unseasonable jests, which buffoons and scurrilous persons make of men and things, which no way deserve them; making themselves mirth at the

† Eph. v. 3—4.

expend of the good name, reputation and peace of others, generally better than themselves, and treating with ridicule and contempt subjects of the most sacred and venerable kind, without wit or fear. Upon which Account St. Jude tells us, that the Lord will come to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all that are ungodly amongst them, not only of their ungodly deeds which they have impiously committed, but of all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him \*. And therefore the Apostle James speaks of the absolute necessity of governing the tongue; and censuring the practice of those who allowed themselves in imprecations and curses on others, tells them: *My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree bear olive berries, either a vine figs, or a fountain yield forth salt water and fresh* ||? Arguing from the natural impossibility of the same trees bearing two different and contrary sorts of fruits, and the same fountains sending forth two contrary kind of streams, how indecent and unnatural it is, that the tongue which was made to praise God should ever be employed in the cursing men, which are made after the similitude of God. Agreeable to which is our Lord's advice: *Swear not at all. But let your communication be, yea, yea. Nay, nay; a mere simple affirmation or denial; for whatsoever is more than these, all stronger asseverations, all kind of oaths, how*

\* Jude 15.

|| Jam. iii. 10.—12.



petty or inconsiderable soever they may appear, *come of evil*, argue a bad disposition of mind, or as the words may be rendred : Whatever is beyond these is from the evil one, is suggested and prompted by the devil. In a word, this government of our words is of so great consequence in the Christian morality, as that the Apostle declares : *If any man amongst you seems to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth himself, this man's religion is vain* †. Hence it is no wonder.

3. That our Saviour's rules of morality should reach to the *whole compass of mens actions*, comprehend every circumstance and condition of their lives, reach to all their various relations and connections of being, prohibit every kind of immorality and vice, and enjoin the practice of all the several virtues, that can take place in the whole of our existence. This is a fact that none can deny, who are conversant in the writings of the New Testament, and it is one principal circumstance that gives the preference to his doctrine, and renders it superior to that of all other lawgivers and instructors whatsoever. In the whole of his behaviour he manifested the utmost abhorrence of all kind of vices, reprehended them with freedom and severity, and was himself absolutely free from every kind of stain and blemish whatsoever. Thus in general he tells his hearers, *a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit, every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit,*

† Jam. i. 26.

is hewn down and cast into the fire †; plainly hereby teaching, that all men, who are destitute of the fruits of righteousness, and whose lives are corrupt and wicked, shall never be acknowledged as his genuine disciples, but are reserved like barren or rotten trees for certain destruction. And therefore he expressly commands, the mortification of all our inward habits of sin, and the breaking off every evil way, how long soever we may be accustomed to it, and how difficult soever the doing it may be. *If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. For it is profitable for thee, that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell ‡*: A proverbial form of speech to express the necessity of forsaking all our sins, how reluctant soever we may be to it, or whatever difficulty and self denial we may find necessary to effect it. It would require too great a length of time, particularly to enumerate all the various kinds of vices that are expressly prohibited by the doctrine of Christ. In general, all the sins that are occasioned by causeless or immoderate anger, all kinds of impurities, all the excesses attending covetousness, all the kinds of falshood and deceit, all manner of luxury and intemperance, every species of pride and haughtiness, all instances of injustice, the several sins of private or social life; in a word, every vice that finds a name amongst mankind, or that the inward

† Mat. vii. 17---19

‡ v. 29---30.

lusts and passions of sinners can prompt them to, stands censured and condemned by the morality of our blessed Lord. And on the other hand, all the virtues that arise out of the frame and constitution of human nature, that result from their various characters, stations and engagements of their being, that can render them honourable and lovely, that can create them esteem from men, and tend to render them meet for the approbation and acceptance of God, are clearly and expressly taught, and frequently and powerfully inculcated; such as humility and meekness and lowliness of heart, generosity, kindness and mercy, the love of peace and the desire to promote it, gentleness, moderation of temper, and the readiness to forgiveness and reconciliation, the utmost purity of behaviour and life, constancy and fidelity in the private contracts of life, the love and practice of universal righteousness in all our transactions with others, candor and equity with respect to other men's character and state, temperance and moderation in the use of all external blessings, obedience to parents, and the care of their welfare, due attention to the faithful instructions of wise and honest teachers, proper subjection to our rulers and governors; in a word, all the various branches of duty that have any obligation or use in private or publick life, that respect either our own personal conduct and regulation of our selves, or that relate to our behaviour, or right management of ourselves towards others; all these things are expressly provided for and enjoined by the doctrines and instructions of Christ.

It hath been excepted against, as an argument of the imperfection of our blessed Saviour's morality, that it takes no notice of the particular case of *friendship*, hath no admonitions to cultivate it, nor any rules that teach men how to contract and preserve and strengthen it. And I acknowledge, that there is no precept obliging men to seek after, and enter into peculiar intimacies and friendships with particular persons. And this, in my judgment, is so far from being any real objection against the excellency of Christ's morality, as that 'tis rather a proof of the real wisdom and prudence of the great Lawgiver of christianity, and that had there been any particular law, of universal obligation, obliging all persons without exception to enter into the engagements of particular friendship, it would have been a real blemish to his doctrine, and what it would have been difficult to have vindicated upon the principles of expediency and true reason.

For in the first place, the contracting such friendships is no natural, necessary, unalterable duty of human nature, nor any kind of characteristick of a man of principle, probity and virtue. The happiness of society by no means depends on it, which is supported by a more general benevolence, and enlarged affection towards all of whom societies consist, and which therefore must over-rule every private affection, when the private and publick affections and interests happen to interfere. Nor farther, are private and exclusive friendships always and in their natures, and invariably



commendable and good, being sometimes founded on and cemented by very improper and criminal motives, and contracted to accomplish the most injurious and iniquitous purposes; and therefore could not in reason and equity be made the subject of a general or universal command, of which nothing is in truth capable, but that which is simply in its nature, and immutably good.—And then, what is of principal regard is, that friendships in private life do not depend on choice, and that all persons are not formed for it, the circumstances of others will not admit it, and the man that is every way fit for a friend is not always and every where to be met with; and therefore a general command to contract and cultivate such friendships, would be sometimes a command of an impossibility, and at other times of what would be extremely inconvenient and prejudicial. It would be making what is *indifferent* in its nature *necessary*, and what depends on voluntary and free choice, on qualifications that we can't bestow, and a turn of mind in ourselves and others that we can't command, and the inclinations of others over which we have no controul; I say it would be making what depends upon all these circumstances, which are not in our disposal, a necessary and indispensable duty; which is both absurd, and contrary to equity and justice.

Christianity doth not indeed forbid, any more than it commands, private exclusive friendships. Our blessed Lord had amongst  
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the twelve, one that was the beloved disciple, and who seems to have had a peculiar share in his affection and heart. But still it leaves men to their liberty and prudence, as in a matter no ways essentially necessary to their duty and happiness. But as universal benevolence and happiness, the love of mankind in general, and the being kindly affectioned to all without exception, is a matter of the utmost importance, this is in the most express manner provided for by our blessed Saviour's doctrine, and made an essential characteristick of his genuine disciples. And as all particular friendships must be regulated by the common rules of morality and virtue, our blessed Saviour's doctrine furnishes plain and certain directions, which if they are observed and duly attended to, will preserve them strict and inviolable, keep them from being perverted and abused, and teach men so to manage them, as that they shall be productive of the most valuable benefits and advantages. And the more impartially this part of our Saviour's doctrine is examined, it will appear more compleat and extensive, and the conclusion upon the whole will be : *That never man spoke like this man.* And this is the more regardable if we consider

2. The *circumstances* of the *time* and *people* when he delivered his doctrine; when the morality of the law of God was adulterated by the false glosses and corrupt interpretations of the scribes and pharisees, the authorized instructors of the people, held in great dis-

steem, and represented as of little worth and value in comparison of certain things which they liked better, and had introduced into the room of it. So that our blessed Master was forced to oppose himself to their traditions and errors, to vindicate the moral precepts of God from the violence which they had offered them, and to correct the loose explications, which these masters in *Israel*, these guides and instructors of the people, had given of them\*. They were for adhering absolutely to the letter of the law, without any regard to the spirit and intention of it, and for weakening men's obligations to observe some of the most essential and necessary duties commanded by God. The law said, *thou shalt not kill*, and therefore passion and anger, reviling and opprobrious language, and all the effects of an ungoverned and intemperate resentment, were it seems by their construction lawful and harmless, provided they kept to the letter of the law. *Thou shalt not commit adultery*, every thing else was lawful for them that a corrupt heart could suggest and dictate to them. If they did not *forswear* themselves, when they made use of God's name in their oaths, they might swear by Heaven, and God's throne and footstool, and by any thing else, without ever regarding the performance of such oaths, or so much as suspecting themselves guilty of perjury if they violated them†. Admirable casuists thus to ease the rigours of God's law, and thus

\* Mat. v. 20.

† 23.

dexterously to find out methods to excuse themselves, from almost every thing they had no inclination to perform. For besides these loose explications given by these prudent and honest casuists, they had farther introduced, what their successors ever since could never be persuaded to part with, the doctrine of commuting and compounding for their immoralities, and violations of the moral law of God; and of juggling out some kind of duties by others, which they put in the room of them. Thus they found those *weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and fidelity*; extremely troublesome in their practice, and interfering with some particular views of interest or pleasure. How should they abate of the rigour of the law in these instances? Why, by being more exact in *tything mint, anise, and cummin*. If they had a desire to be excused from any one of God's commands, written in the law of *Moses*, they had recourse to an *oral tradition*, which they esteemed as of greater authority than the written law itself §. It was a command of the law, *Honour thy father and thy mother*; a precept that implied in it support and maintenance, when they were aged, infirm and poor. But if any one had put off natural affection and gratitude, and wanted to evade the obligation of this law, it was but saying: *'Tis a gift by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me*, i. e. all I can spare for your relief I have consecrated and given to God,

§ Mat. xv. 3.



and therefore you shall receive nothing from me, thus teaching men through a pretence of honouring God to dishonour their parents, and by giving to him to defraud them, and by a shew of piety to become execrably cruel and unnatural. By these and other like methods, though *they drew near to God with their mouths, and honoured him with their lips*; though they made their boast in the law, thought it their honour to be descended from *Abraham*, gloried even in God as their Father, and were extremely devout in all the external, ritual and ceremonial part of worship, so that in this righteousness they were blameless; yet they were sunk into the greatest depths of immorality and wickedness, and had grown into one of the most corrupt, profligate and abandoned nations upon the face of the earth. Now to these gross corruptions our blessed Saviour opposed the purer doctrine of his morality, rescuing the honour of his Father's law from those shameful glosses, by which they had obscured the lustre and debased the purity of it, discovered the true spirit and internal meaning of it, shewed the full latitude and extent of it, and called men to the practice of that genuine, pure, universal morality and virtue, which alone can be an acceptable service to God, and finally profitable to men themselves. But

3. He not only taught an *uniform, pure and uncorrupted morality*, but placed it upon a *proper foundation of importance and necessity*, represented it in its true worth and value, and shewed

shewed how indispensibly requisite it was to all the valuable purposes, and best interests of our beings. Those who entertain a mean and contemptible opinion of *moral virtue*, think that 'tis of no consequence in christianity, and that *faith* is to answer all the ends of Happiness and Salvation, have not yet rightly *learned Christ*, nor been fully *taught the truth as it is in Jesus*. *Faith* in a christian is the *principle* of action; and unblameable *morals* are the proper *fruits* and *evidences* of it. *Faith* brings us into a *justified state*, but 'tis *living* by faith, or practising all those virtues of a good life which God hath commanded, that *preserves* us in that *grace wherein we stand*. Faith furnishes the grand motives to morality; morality discovers the life, and is a noble evidence of the power and efficacy of faith. Where faith is genuine, morality is its constant companion; and morality wants its noblest character and recommendation that doth not spring from faith. Both are in their place necessary, indispensibly necessary, and equally so; faith as the root, morals as the branches; faith as the spring and source, morals as the streams that flow from it. Salvation is of faith, as it is the inward principle of a divine life; nor can there be any Salvation without good morals, because where these are wanting there are no signs of a divine life, but the certain evidence that we are barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To assert the necessity of both diminishes nothing from the dignity of either, and the representing

presenting them as inseparably connected, reserves to each its proper place and importance, and secures the honour, the interest and usefulness of both.

What place the christian morality bears in the gospel of Christ, let our Lord himself determine, and let us abide by that determination, as the best and surest we can trust to. When one of the Pharisees put a question to him, to tempt him, *i. e.* to try his skill, and in hopes of such an answer from him, as might furnish him with some considerable objection against his doctrine; saying to him, *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?* *Jesus said unto him: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy Mind; this is the first and great commandment* §. And this was a sufficient and full answer to the question put to him. But our Lord, in order to reprove the Pharisees, who were extremely loose in their principles and practices as to the moral duties of the second table, adds; *The second is like unto it, like to it in importance, value and necessity, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self;* under which is comprehended all the various duties that we owe to others, and that our neighbour, *i. e.* every man who hath any interest in or connection with us, can demand, or hath a right to expect or claim from us. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets;* this is the sum and substance of both, and to these two comprehensive pre-

cepts the whole of them may be reduced. Hence our blessed Lord tells his disciples: *Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets* †, to set up such a temporal kingdom, and promote the honour and success of it by such methods, as shall contradict and be inconsistent with that love of God and your neighbour, which is the avowed and principal design of both. *I am not come to destroy but to fulfil*; to accomplish all their prophecies, and to establish all their great rules of morality and virtue. *For verily I say unto you: Till Heaven and Earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.* The law in its essential obligations, i. e. the moral part of it, shall be as durable as the foundations of Heaven and Earth, and these shall sooner be removed, than any the least of it shall go without its proper and full accomplishment. *Whosoever therefore, adds our Lord, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of God, i. e. he shall have no share in the blessings of it. But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.* He shall have a proportionable and superior reward. And to shew, that he spoke properly of the moral part of the law, or those duties of virtue in which the Scribes and Pharisees were scandalously defective, he adds, *For I say unto you, that except your Righteousness shall exceed that of the Scribes*

† Mat. v. 17. 20.



*and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* In the ritual righteousness of the law none could exceed them. In the moral part of it they were scandalously defective. And therefore unless we exceed them in moral excellencies and virtues, we shall have no portion or lot in the blessings of the Kingdom of God. These are those duties which our Lord styles the *weightier matters of the law*, comprehending all of them under those three principal ones, *judgment, mercy and fidelity* †; and for the omission of which no zeal for rites, and real duties of less importance, can be any compensation. And to mention no more upon so plain an article, our Lord declares, at the conclusion of that excellent sermon on the Mount, that no extraordinary gifts, not the very power of doing miracles, would be of any avail for men's acceptance, if they were at last found to have lived in the habitual violation of his commands; but that notwithstanding every plea of this nature they could *urge*, yet that if they were convicted of being workers of iniquity, our Lord would disown all knowledge of and friendship with them, and forever banish them from his kingdom and presence; *but that whosoever heard his sayings and did them, was like a wise man, who builds his house on a rock*, so that no storm whatsoever can destroy it. His hopes are supported by the surest foundation, and nothing shall be able to prevent his final Salvation and Happiness.

† Mat. xxii. 23.

Upon this foundation of importance the morality taught by our blessed Saviour stands; and as the great duties essential to it arise out of the nature of things, and are of perpetual and immutable obligation, whilst the present constitution of things remain; it became the great teacher of righteousness, and the Son of God in the character of the reformer and restorer of mankind, not only to give a full, clear and extensive account of them, but to represent them in such a view of necessity and indispensable obligation, as that none might hope for impunity, that should habitually disregard them, or place any other things whatsoever in the room of them; but might learn rather to omit the less necessary branches even of religion and piety, when they stood in competition with these; according to the rule prescribed even by God himself: *I will have mercy rather than sacrifice*; I prefer the exercise of mercy to man, rather than a sacrifice to myself, when one of the two must of necessity be omitted.

And yet I would farther observe on this head, that how important soever our blessed Lord represents moral virtues and duties to be, yet he teaches us to practice them with great *humility*, places no real *merit* in them, nor gives the least encouragement to expect eternal life and happiness from them, as a reward due to us as a *debt*, and as what we can claim from the justice of God in consequence of them. No. The language he puts into our mouths is more becoming our condition as creatures and sinners:

*Likewise*

Likewise ye, when ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say: *We are unprofitable servants, for we have only done that which was our duty to do* †. All we expect and can hope for is from *mercy* only, though faith and good works prepare us for God's gifts, such as he shall please to bestow, yet what he gives is of mere favour, and *through the redemption that is in Christ*. I add farther

4. That notwithstanding the excellency and perfection of the morality taught by our blessed Saviour, and the noble height to which his doctrine carries it, yet that 'tis in the whole of it *practicable*, suited to the nature, circumstances, and various conditions of men, such as belongs to and must enter into private life, and such on which the peace and welfare of the greater and lesser societies of human life do universally depend. Amongst other objections against Christianity it hath been urged, that the morality it teaches is of *too refined and exalted* a nature to become practicable, and is above the level of human infirmity, and not duly attuned to their condition of imperfection and weakness. There is indeed no answering such an objection as this, unless the *particulars* excepted against were *specified*, and the rigours and undue severities of the Christian morality were severally pointed out. Unquestionably a virtuous life hath it's difficulties, and inclination and passion will always militate against righteousness and truth. But if that

† Luke xvii. 10.

be unreasonably severe which is contrary to strong inclination and inveterate habit, what will at last be reasonable? The inclinations of men are so various, that every virtue in its turn will be complained of as a rigorous restraint, and a burthen too heavy to be endured; and the whole moral law of God be censured as contrary to equity, and requiring a perfection of virtue above the ability and strength of human nature to perform.

The extending morality to the *heart* and *inward passions*, and obliging men to regulate their affections and desires, which unquestionably is the most difficult part of it, is yet so necessary and indispensable, as that the giving a full licence to these, and the allowing men the free indulgence, and leaving them at liberty to cherish and harbour them, would tend to the utter subversion of all morality in practice, and would be giving men a licence to banish all kind of virtue out of the world, for if the heart and affections be corrupt, the life must be so, as the effects will ever be answerable to the causes that produce them. And therefore, if the obligations to mortify our sinful passions and corrupt inclinations and habits, are not unreasonable and severe, beyond the bounds of equity, the laying us under the same obligations to abstain from those inclinations, as from those vicious practices to which irregular and criminal inclinations prompt and lead men, cannot be justly charged, as rigorous and hard beyond the rules and dictates of such equity. Because  
when



when once the passions are duly regulated, and the habits of sin are broken and extinguished, the difficulty of virtue is in great measure over, and men will naturally run the path of God's commandments with an enlarged, willing and chearful heart; especially when better sentiments take place, and contrary habits and dispositions are settled, all the great duties of morality enjoined by Christ, will then be the most delightful and easy service. Engage but inclination on the side of duty, and it will become familiar and natural to us, and custom and habit will most effectually remove all the pretended difficulties to the practice of every thing that is good. And on this foundation our blessed Lord invited men *to come and learn of him, and take his yoke upon them, because his yoke was easy*, or rather profitable and good, as the word signifies, and *his burthen was light*. Nothing is hard to a willing mind; nothing is difficult where the affections of our hearts lead us.

There is no single virtue enjoined by the morality of Christ, but what true reason commends the fitness and necessity of; no one that doth not arise out of the nature of things, and hath not a tendency to promote the happiness of mankind. No one that can be spared out of human life, and that doth not belong to some necessary relation and valuable interest in it. Not that all the same virtues, nor the same degrees of goodness, are equally and necessarily required of all. Men have different capacities, opportunities and advantages.

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Their talents and abilities are some more, some less. They have distinct parts to act in life, and peculiar stations and spheres of action to move in. What is required of them by the Christian morality is, *that they act their own part well*, improve their own advantages, and be found faithful in the discharge of their proper duty. So that the morality of Christ, is as reason and equity require it should be, adapted to the various states and advantages of men. And though some duties equally belong to all, yet others are peculiar and especially accommodated to the different stations and characters of men; and such gracious condescensions are made to all, as that they are allowed the *benefit of repentance* for all their errors and defects, which they are careful to amend, and correct by a better behaviour for the future. And what still renders the Christian morality the more practicable is,

5. The consideration of *those peculiar motives*, with which our blessed Saviour hath strengthened and enforced it. If his morality be in its nature very exalted and perfect, the considerations he suggests to enable and strengthen us for practising it, are every way answerable, and such as were never offered under any other institution whatsoever; such as cannot be exceeded in their importance, nor fail of success, if by faith they are made real to the mind, and the influence of them be not violently and unnaturally prevented. When he would enforce the duties that were to take place in his kingdom, 'twas not by an *authority* merely

human, but by that of *God himself*, the sovereign and universal Lord. The *great example* he held up to their imitation, in the practice of that virtue he recommended, was that of the same infinitely blessed and glorious being; and his exhortation was : *Be ye perfect as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.* And as he was in his own life, *holy, unblameable and without rebuke*, becoming his character as the Son of God, as he practised the most difficult and useful virtues; he invites us : *Learn of me, for I am lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls.* And when he encouraged his disciples to submit to his authority, and obey the laws of his Kingdom, 'twas by such substantial benefits and advantages, as were worthy to be offered by him who had a divine commission, and was sent of God into the world to call sinners to repentance, and persuade them to return to God. All the encouragements offered under the law, were of temporal good things; and under the gospel, the practice of morality and virtue, agreeable to God's will, frequently draws after it his *peculiar blessing*, and in the *nature of things* tends to prosperity and happiness. Hence our blessed Lord pronounces : *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth\**; their very humility and gentleness shall ordinarily secure them favour, protection, friendship, and peace upon Earth, and give them the most comfortable possession of it : *Seek ye the kingdom of God,*

\* Mat. v. 9.

*and the righteousness thereof, and all these things, all the needful comforts of life, shall be added to you †. So that all the temporal promises of the old law are in christianity so far in force, as that according to the nature and general constitution of things, every virtue tends to some real good, and there is not a single duty in all the morality of the gospel, that doth not some way or other contribute to promote some very valuable interest of the present life, health, or chearfulness of spirits, or reputation, or friends, or success in our stations and employments; insomuch that it may still be said, that godliness and virtue are profitable for all things, and have the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. And this promise of the future life, and of all the blessings connected with it, is that which gives the highest excellency and worth to the gospel scheme of morality, and renders the doctrine of Christ superior to that of all other law-givers whatsoever. Who can read those Beatitudes which he pronounced, duly weigh their importance in his mind, and attentively survey the substantial good things contained in them, without feeling an holy warmth in his breast, a strong ardor of desire, and a fixed ambition to secure them? The merciful shall obtain mercy. They that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. The mourners shall be comforted, the pure in heart shall see God, the peace-makers shall be called the children of God, the poor in spirit and the perse-*

†. Mat. vi. 33.



*cuted for righteousness sake shall enjoy the kingdom of Heaven, forgive men their trespasses, and your heavenly Father shall forgive you; judge not, that ye be not judged, the strait gate, and the narrow way leadeth to life, he that doth the will of my Father shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.* Encouragements and promises like these, could not but draw the attention, and excite the ambition of those who heard them, and cause him who made them to appear superior to the *Scribes and Pharisees*, and in a much more advantageous light than these cold and lifeless teachers of the people, who if their instructions were good, and agreeable to the will of God, yet wanted these considerations to enforce them, and render them effectual on the minds of those who were their hearers and disciples.

Especially as on the other hand, the *danger of disobedience*, and the *evils* incurred by an habitual violation of those precepts of moral virtue in which he instructed them, were represented in such a light, as were sufficient to strike them with a becoming awe, and awaken the most substantial fears in their minds. *Fear not them which kill the body, but fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell. The unprofitable servant shall be cast out into utter darkness, where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. I will profess to them I know*

*know you not, depart from me ye that work iniquity. Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.* He who thus called into his aid all the great realities of the eternal world, and enforced his doctrine and morality by the rewards of Heaven, and the endless punishments of the life to come, might well astonish those who heard him, who had been unaccustomed to such instructions, and make them confess: He taught them *as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.* I shall only add

6. Lastly, one farther peculiar excellency of the morality of Christ, and that is, his teaching us how to *improve* and *exalt* it into real, substantial, and acceptable *religion* and *piety*. When the duties of life are practiced *merely* on the motives of any *present* advantages, the preservation of health, reputation, peace in the world, and the success of our temporal affairs, this doth not amount so high as morality and virtue. 'Tis nothing better than mere worldly policy and prudence. What properly constitutes any action *virtuous* is the doing it from the natural *reasonableness* and *fitness* of the thing, and because it arises out of our circumstances and relations in life. When our regards go higher, and we practice virtue, not only because of its intrinsic reasonableness, but because *agreeable to the will of God*, and *injoined by his authority*, and from a firm persuasion, that he is a rewarder of them that *seek him*; this gives every virtue an higher character,

character, and advances it into an act of *true religion*, and an instance of homage and worship to the blessed God. And when the same action is performed from *faith in Christ*, from a desire to imitate his example, from a spirit of submission to his authority, and with the hope of a future recompence through him, as God's appointed *mediator*, it then becomes an instance of *Christian piety*, and receives its finishing perfection and highest value. And of this every wise and good man would be ambitious, that nothing may be wanting to render his character compleat, nor any circumstance in his actions defective, so as to lessen the intrinsic worth and excellency of them. And this is the happiness of men who practice morality upon the gospel scheme, and according to the doctrine taught by our blessed Lord. It gives the *utmost perfection* to their actions they are capable of, and cloaths them with every single circumstance that can heighten their value and render them an acceptable service to God.

Understanding Christians are as sensible of the natural obligations of morality and virtue, as any persons whatsoever, and they have this satisfaction and pleasure, that by abounding in all the fruits of righteousness, they are acting a wise and reasonable part, such a part as suits their relations and engagements in life, and as contributes to the strengthening and promoting every valuable interest of the present state. But then they are taught to consider, that the  
*relation*

relation they bear to God is the *primary* one of their being, that their dependence on him is necessary, their obligations to him innumerable, their intire and absolute subjection to his authority their unquestionable duty, and every instance of moral virtue enforced by his will; that his displeasure is the most formidable evil of their beings, and his favour, approbation, and acceptance, the most comprehensive blessing of which they can be partakers. And therefore they submit to the rules of virtue, and carefully practice the duties of morality, out of reverence to God, gratitude and affection to him for all his benefits, earnest desire of his acceptance and favour, and a lively constant hope in his eternal mercy and goodness. And as they owe the full discovery of the moral will of God to the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ, as they receive the best motives to practice it from his Gospel, as they are to obtain from his word and spirit all their best assistances to enable them to persevere in it, as the hope of forgiveness of all their numerous errors and defects, arises from the divine mercy, through the propitiation of his death, and as he is constituted the great distributor of his Father's rewards to all the faithful and obedient; they are quickened by these and the like considerations to all patience in good works, to abound continually in those fruits of righteousness, that are commendable in their own nature, and made necessary both by natural and revealed religion.



So that in the morality of a true Christian, every good circumstance, every worthy motive, every consideration of real importance, conspires to heighten its moral excellency, and render it a sacrifice well pleasing and acceptable to God. 'Tis the truest prudence and wisdom, 'tis the height of virtue, 'tis *more* than virtue, 'tis obedience to God, 'tis genuine piety, an act of veneration and homage to the supreme Being; 'tis a rational sacrifice to his honour, 'tis the proof of subjection and love to Christ, demonstrates the life and power of faith, is inspired by the motives of his Gospel, is practiced with the lively hope in his power and faithfulness; and thus upon every scheme of truth must have every circumstance of advantage and commendation, and entitle the doer to every kind of recompence that can arise out of the nature of things, or be insured by the constitution, engagement and promise of God.

And thus I have set before you an account of the *morality* inculcated by the doctrine of *Christ*; and as this constitutes so great a part of the instructions he gave, and was what he taught throughout the whole of his ministration on earth; let none imagine that morality is a subject unfit to be taught by a Christian instructor, or any way beneath the dignity of the character of a minister of Christ. I can never think that to be a low method of preaching which was made use of by the Son of God, nor those doctrines unnecessary for you to hear,  
which

which he did not think it unnecessary for himself to preach. I know moral virtue may be taught in a justly offensive manner, when justice and charity to men, and temperance and moderation, and the like moral human virtues are represented as the whole of mens duty, exclusive of faith and piety to God, or when they have such an efficacy and virtue imputed to them, as to render all the provisions of the grace of God in Christ wholly useless and unnecessary for our acceptance and salvation. Thus I hope I shall never preach, nor thus would I have you learn morality. Assign it its proper place, its genuine excellency, its natural importance, 'tis one of the glories of Christianity, one of the fairest proofs of its divine original, and renders it worthy of all acceptance. Separate it from Christ's religion, and you deform, maim and mutilate Christianity, render it a most imperfect institution, insufficient for the happiness of the world, and the salvation of men. Though morality doth not merit a reward, it fits for receiving it, and therefore secures the final grant of it. Though 'tis not to be put in the room of Christ, yet Christ never comes without it. Where he dwells by faith, the good works of morality are the sure signs of his presence, and the abounding in them one of the most effectual methods we can take, to secure his friendship. Morality indeed, when it renders men negligent in the rules of piety, from an imagination that 'tis sufficient of itself, without

without being beholden to religion, is rated above its worth, and forfeits its reward; and pretences to piety without good morals are the very characteristicks of hypocrisy. Godliness without virtue is nothing better than the appearance of gold where the substance is wanting, and virtue without godliness is like a dead unanimated picture that wants the proper colours and beauties to enliven and finish it. Godliness and virtue are both inspired by the same principles of a divine faith, are equally shoots from the same root, and nourished and strengthened by the same friendly heat and showers from above, and the genuine fruits of both are highly ornamental to him that bears them, and each sets and adds to the lustre and charms of the other. The reverence and love of God, when connected and flourishing together with benevolence, justice and universal goodness to men, appear in a familiar, pleasing and amiable view; and when the human virtues are improved by principles of faith, practiced by the motives of religion, and attended with a substantial piety and godliness, they appear with a majesty and dignity that God approves, and men behold with admiration and esteem; and that consciousness which arises from the possession of both, gives a satisfaction that nothing else can introduce, inspires the heart with an humble, cheerful confidence in God, and strengthens that lively hope in his mercy through Christ, which nothing can disappoint, and which unless supported

ported by this sure foundation, is in reality nothing better than presumption and vanity. This is the character I would wish myself to be found in living and dying, and into which I earnestly pray I may be instrumental under God to form every one of you. Then should I fulfil that ministry which I have received of the Lord, and rejoice over and with you in the day of Christ,



SERMON



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## S E R M O N III.

The Excellency of the Christian Doctrine.

JOHN vii. 46.

*The Officers said : Never man spake  
like this man.*

**H**AVING thus shewn you what the doctrine of our blessed Lord was, both with respect to religion and morality, I now come to shew you in some few particulars, the peculiar and incomparable excellency of it, and the circumstances that recommended the instructions he gave, so as to render him a teacher superior to all others whatsoever.

I. There is an apparent *dignity* and *importance* throughout the whole of our blessed Saviour's doctrine, nothing *mean and low*, and unbecoming the character of one inspired and *commissioned by God*. 'Tis not to be thought that the blessed God should send an extraordinary messenger upon a design of little or no consequence to mankind, or that a person under the inspiration of the spirit of wisdom should deliver things trivial, or deservedly sub-  
ject

ject to ridicule and contempt, or of no use to the real interest and happiness of the world. Had there been any thing of this, it would have been a just exception against our Saviour's character, and have given room for some unfavourable suspicions concerning him. But of this there is not the least appearance. And this is the more remarkable, in that the *Jewish* teachers entertained their hearers with subjects extremely contemptible, of no worth in themselves, and that conveyed no true wisdom, no profitable instruction to those who attended on them. They were dextrous in explaining their oral traditions, they could define the length and breadth of their phylacteries, they were great adepts in the forms and manners of external ceremonies, and they knew how, upon occasion, to explain away or soften down to their passions and inclinations, a divine command. And upon this foundation they partly raised their reputation for learning and knowledge amongst the people; whilst at the same time they were in reality a set of ignorant, prejudiced, bigotted wretches, who had little true knowledge, and needed, in the most important subjects, to be instructed as much as the meanest of the people. Their true character was that given of them by our Lord, *blind leaders of the blind*. How different was the conduct of Christ? Though he treated the law of Moses, as a revelation from God, with the respect it deserved, obeyed it himself and excused none from the observance of it, whilst the obligation of it remained in full force;  
yet

yet we never once find him extolling the excellency, or rigidly enforcing the practice of any kind of ceremonies whatsoever, or ever entertaining his disciples and hearers with useless and unprofitable subjects; but always insisting on such as were of native, substantial and immutable worth. And though he often times grounded his instructions upon the most common and ordinary occurrences, and drew his similitudes from the most familiar objects, yet in the application of them he ever maintained a proper decency, never sunk into extravagancies, nor by his own use of them ever gave occasion to those minute and low inferences that have been sometimes drawn from them by men of fertile, but low imaginations. No. The subjects on which he insisted were the noblest and most exalted, and in comparison of which, all other parts of science are unprofitable and vain. Our blessed Lord himself gives the true account of the nature of his own doctrine: *The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life* †; they relate to things of a divine and spiritual nature, and when received and believed they have a power and efficacy to restore men to a spiritual life, and to prepare and fit them for life eternal. The authority of God, his great love to mankind in sending his Son into the world, not to condemn it, but that the world through him might be saved, the nature of religion, the obligations to obedience and duty,

† John vi. 63.

the resurrection to life, the universal judgment and the consequent events of everlasting life and death, the end and design of his own mission, his own sufferings and death for mankind, and the glory that should follow; these, and others relating to them and connected with them, were the great articles in which he instructed his hearers, and to the knowledge and belief of which he called them.

2. And as these were subjects of the utmost importance in themselves, so the manner in which he taught them was answerable, such as became a teacher sent from God. 'Tis observed by the Evangelist, after the account given us of the sermon on the mount, *that when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes* \*. These, when they instructed others in the most honourable and useful subjects, were only expounders of the Law and Prophets, and as to these, they were neither to add nor diminish. But our blessed Master taught with a *majesty* becoming a *divine lawgiver*, and as one who knew the instructions that he delivered were by immediate order and commission from God his Father, and that he had fullness of power conferred on him to deliver the doctrines of the kingdom of God. His language was commanding and authoritative: *I say unto you*. Whether the laws of Moses were to be understood in the confined sense of the letter

\* Mat vii. 28—29.



of them, or whether the literal sense in which the Scribes explained them was contrary to the spirit and intention of them, our Lord overruled both, and though this and the other was said by them of old time, he commanded a more spiritual law, and extended the obligation of it to the heart and conscience, under the most awful sanctions, as men valued their salvation, and would escape the condemnation of the life to come; hereby assuming an extraordinary power, and acting as one who knew his warrant to be immediately from God. This was what the people had never been accustomed to, and which justly made them wonder at the manner of his teaching, as they did at the miraculous works which he performed. And this is

3. Another consideration, that shews the peculiar excellency, and the superior *dignity* of our Lord's manner of instruction, viz. *the extraordinary method* by which he *confirmed* his doctrine by such *miraculous works*, as evidently demonstrated that he really acted in the name and by the power of his Father. Amongst other things in which the Jews themselves allow the second temple to be inferior in glory to the first, one is, that it wanted the spirit of *prophecy*, and the extraordinary power of doing *miracles*, both which had ceased for many ages, and which they expected would be revived upon the appearance of the great prophet or Messiah. And therefore in controversies of a difficult nature, they used to refer the determination of it, 'till the prophet,  
the

the faithful prophet should come. To which unquestionably that of *Luke* refers, the people glorified God, saying that a great prophet is risen up amongst us, and that God hath visited his people. This gift of prophecy they expected should be restored under the Messiah. And this was their common and national hope. And therefore when *John the Baptist*, who seems to have expected a temporal Messiah, and to have been disappointed that Jesus did not take the kingdom, and deliver him out of the prison in which *Herod* had thrown him, I say when *John* sent to our Lord two of his disciples to enquire of him? Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another\*? Jesus returned no other answer to him by the messengers but this: Go again and shew *John* those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them; and blessed is he, who-so-ever shall not be offended in me; well knowing, that *John* knew how to draw the proper inference, and cautioning him at the same time not to be offended in him, not to renounce him as the Messiah, because he did not set up for a temporal prince and saviour. And when the people heard his doctrine, and saw his works, they cried out: Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? when Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these, which this man hath done? || These were the charac-

\* Mat. xi. 3—5.

|| John vii. 26—31.

terifticks, by which he was to be especially known and distinguished, his doctrine and his miracles; the latter to confirm and establish the former. Both these were united in Christ, and as his doctrine was the most excellent in its nature, his works were the most extraordinary, and the inference of *Nicodemus* is unquestionably true: *Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do those miracles that thou doest, except God be with him\**. In which words *Nicodemus* expressly declares the miracles of Christ to be such, as could not be done, but by the immediate assistance and presence of God himself. And this was the doctrine of our blessed Lord, who expressly ascribes the miracles he did to his Father's efficacy and all powerful operation. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do †; nothing but what is agreeable to his Father's purpose, and what he hath received a commission from him to do. For whatsoever he doeth, those things he also doeth, viz. the Father himself acting in and by him. For the Father loveth the Son, and shews him all the things which he himself doth; hath given him power and authority to do his works, and to manage all things relating to his kingdom in the world, and the final accomplishment of the redemption of his people. And therefore he draws this inference: The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that*

\* John iii. 2.

† v. 19—20.

*the Father hath sent me*†. They are full proof that I act by a real commission from him, and that the doctrine I deliver in his name is agreeable to his will: 'Tis but a low use, that some persons make of the miracles of Christ, who argue that the only design of them was, to awaken and excite the attention of those to whom he preached, and not to *prove* the truth of his doctrine. But this is contrary to the express assertion of our blessed Lord, who appeals to his miracles as substantial decisive proofs of his mission from God, and the consequent truth and certainty of what he taught in his name. *The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me*†. *If I work not the works of my Father believe me not*||. *But if I do, though ye believe not me, viz. upon my testimony of myself, believe the works, that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him*§. This is such a demonstration of his acting in and by me, as is greater than all exception, and as renders their unbelief exceeding irrational and criminal.

And this appeal and method of arguing is just in itself. For as nothing is a more authentick proof of the truth of any thing than the testimony of God concerning it, so no testimony can be more authentick, than that which he gives by bestowing the power of working miracles. For if any man doth those works, which no man can do, except God be with him, and doth them in confirmation of his

† John v. 36.

† x. 25.

|| x. 37.

§ x. 38.



divine authority to instruct men in the truths, and teach them the doctrines relating to his kingdom; then God himself immediately interposes to establish the divine authority claimed, and the truth of the doctrines taught by virtue of such claim; actions carrying in them as strong a kind of proofs, as any words whatsoever. And though the nature of the proof arising from testimony be different from that which arises from *demonstration*, or the perception of the agreement between the several ideas, of which the truth or doctrine consists; yet as the knowledge of God is infinite, as he cannot deceive others, nor be in the least measure mistaken or deceived himself, the proof that arises from his testimony is as real, substantial and satisfactory, as that which is founded upon the strictest demonstration that can possibly be given. And when any doctrines have both these kinds of proofs, that of divine testimony, and that which flows from the nature of the thing itself, as is the case of many of the doctrines of christianity, they are then established upon the surest foundation, and our faith in them is confirmed by the most substantial and undeniable evidence that can attend them. And 'tis this consideration, that gives a superior efficacy and authority to the religion of Christ, not only the *intrinsic goodness* and reasonableness of the principles and precepts of which it consists, but that *miraculous proof* by which God enabled him to confirm it, in the power he exercised over evil and impure spirits, over all the diseases of human nature

nature, over the winds and waves of the sea, in creating bread for the hungry, and raising the dead; and, in a word, by his commanding the animate and inanimate creation, and their instantly obeying his voice, and producing the effects he commanded them. The numerous miracles that he did, the extraordinary nature of them, and that power of doing them which constantly resided in him, demonstrated, that as there was no fallacy or collusion in the works themselves, they were in truth the works of the Father, and his authentick seal to the truth of his mission and doctrine, in and by whom the Father performed them.

4. 'Tis also farther observable, that he taught in the most *open and publick* manner, and with such a *boldness and courage*, as abundantly shewed the *conscious integrity* of his own heart, and the *full assurance* that he had, that the religion he taught, and what he affirmed of himself, were the certain truths of God his Father. Designing and artful impostors set out warily and with great caution and circumspection, looking out for proper persons on whom they may first practice, and artfully seduce to countenance and favour their pretensions; going on gradually and covertly, before they proclaim their intentions to mankind. Not thus our blessed Lord. As he declared himself *the light of the world*, he shed the beams of his heavenly truth every where around him, taught in the most publick places, amidst the greatest concourse of people, and before those who were in reputation for the wisest and most

learned of the nation. The sermon on the mount was a sermon to a *multitude*, as were many other of the discourses which he delivered. We find him at the solemn *festivals*, at *Jerusalem*, and in the *temple*, teaching the most *numerous* audiences. Frequent were his conferences with the Priests, the Scribes and Pharisees, answering their questions, correcting their errors, silencing their ignorance and malice, reproving their hypocrisy, and exhorting them to repentance. He omitted no opportunity of conveying instruction, in publick or private, to rich or poor, to the learned and unlearned, and wanted no other qualification in his hearers, but a sincere love of truth, and an honest disposition to receive the doctrine of the kingdom of God. And this publick manner of his giving instruction was so well known and notorious a thing, as that the chief Priests and Pharisees themselves declared: *If we let him alone all men will believe on him, perceive ye, how ye prevail nothing\*? Behold the world is gone after him †.* And when he was apprehended under the conduct of the traitor disciple, he said to the multitude: *Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me †.* And when the high priest asked him of his disciples and of his doctrine, our Lord answered him: *I spoke openly to the world. I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither*

\* John xi. 48.

† xii. 19.

† Mat. xxvi. 55.  
the

Serm. 3. *Excellency of the Christian Doctrine.* 87  
*the Jews always resort, and in secret have I said nothing* §.

Truth needs no concealment, and useful truth ought never to be concealed. Truth is bold and free, never willingly flies into corners, and hath no reason to secrete itself from the observance of mankind, or to appear with caution and reserve, or to disguise itself by the low arts of cunning and dissimulation. And the whole conduct of our blessed Saviour, in the publication of his doctrine, shews the greatest candour and integrity, his being absolutely without fear of being convicted of falsehood and contradiction, and the full certainty of his mind as to the truth of what he taught, and of its being indeed the word of God; because he taught it before all ranks and degrees of men, and submitted it to the most severe examination of friends and enemies, of scripture and of reason; agreeable to what he himself declares: *We speak what we know, and testify that we have seen* ||. *As my Father hath taught me I speak these things* \*. *What he hath seen and heard that he testifieth, for he whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God* †. But

5. Though his manner of instruction was publick, yet he manifested at the same time that *submission and humility*, and that regard to his *Father's glory*, that concern to promote his moral government and kingdom, and that absolute disinterestedness as demonstrated, that the open bold manner of instruction which

§ John xviii. 20. || iii. 11. \* viii. 28. † iii 33—34.



he made use of, was not the dictate of self-sufficiency, vain glory, arrogance of spirit, or any other corrupt and criminal disposition, which impostors never fail to discover, and by which sooner or later it betrays itself, and the falshood of the cause in which it engages. There is nothing appears more evident, throughout our blessed Saviour's life and instruction, than that his whole aim was to do himself the will of God, and to promote obedience to it amongst others. The miracles he performed he refers to him, as the great original of them. *The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do*†. The doctrines he taught he expressly declares that he received them from him. *The words that I speak, I speak not of myself*§; giving hereby the most substantial proof that the glorifying his Father was his high ambition, and that he preferred this to all personal considerations of applause and worldly advantages whatsoever. *I seek not my own glory*†. *He that speaks of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him*\*. Though he had many opportunities to have set up for a temporal Messiah and prince, and from what they had seen of his miraculous works, might have had the whole body of the nation to favour his pretensions; insomuch that the chief Priests and Pharisees, met in council, made this a pretence to destroy him: *If we let him thus*

† John v. 19.    § xiv. 10.    † viii. 50.    \* vii. 18.

alone,

alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans will come, and take away both our place and nation ||; yet he discouraged every attempt, and avoided every occasion of this nature; and though he owned himself the *Messiah*, yet to his disciples he talked of his being reproach'd, betray'd, suffering and dying, told the multitude, that he would indeed draw all men to him, but not by arms, and conquest and victory; but if *I be lifted up from the Earth*, i. e. as the Jews understood him, if I am lift up upon the cross and crucified, I will thus draw all men to me †, or bring forth Jews and Gentiles to become by disciples, by the doctrine of Salvation, through a crucified Messiah and Saviour. So that in this divine instructor, authority was mixed with submission, the freedom of his spirit was tempered with humility; he taught in publick, but courted no publick applause, delivered his doctrine with a boldness that became his character as a messenger of God, and yet with that deference to his Father's honour, that was suited to the commission he had received from him. He claimed the reception and reverence of mankind as his due, yet patiently endured the contempt they shewed him, the opposition and contradiction they gave him, and the injurious, malicious and cruel treatment he met with from them.

And how peculiar is the glory of our blessed Saviour on this account, and how greatly doth

|| John xi. 48.

† xii. 32.

he excell all other law-givers and instructors that ever appeared in the world. *Moses commanded the Israelites a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. But he was King in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together* †. He was both their law-giver and their temporal prince. The Legislators also amongst the nations, *Lycurgus, Solon, Numa*, and others, were the governors of those whose polity they settled, and reaped themselves the immediate advantage of their own laws. The *philosophers* of the Gentiles generally taught for *price*, and made their market of the instructions they gave to others. The *Scribes* and *Pbarisees* were intent upon nothing so much as *lucre*, and sought more *the praise of men*, than the praise that comes from God. The *Mabometan* imposture was intirely calculated for the impostor's *grandeur, wealth, and pleasure*, and to raise and establish a worldly dominion and kingdom. But in our Saviour's doctrine there is not the least appearance of such a spirit, nothing lucrative or selfish, he gained no one worldly advantage as a teacher of mankind, but cheerfully submitted to the preaching such a doctrine, as he knew would be disagreeable to his whole nation, and excite the hatred and indignation of both governors and people against himself.

6. Consider farther the absolute *unmixed purity* of his doctrine, and its freedom from

† Deut. xxxiii. 4—5.

every moral taint and blemish, and the incomparable dignity and excellency of it will abundantly appear. Our Lord himself gave a sure rule how to discover the imposture of false teachers. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits †.* A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit †. It is impossible, but that a doctrine which comes from God must be god-like, and worthy of God. It will bear the evident marks and signatures of his rectitude and purity; and one precept and allowance of what is intrinsically evil, any prescribed methods of absolving men from any religious or moral duties, would sufficiently discover such a teacher to have no divine commission, and the doctrine that he taught to have no original from God. In this article the doctrine of Christ is beyond all possible exception, as it breathes in every part of it the most eminent and distinguished sanctity and purity, and is worthy to be pronounced by God himself, as the immediate tendency of it is to render men partakers of a divine nature, and form them into the most perfect resemblance to God in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness. Our blessed Lord lived in the midst of a very corrupt and profligate age and nation, and taught at a season when the sentiments that men had formed of God were extremely false and dis-

† Mat. vii. 16.

† vii. 18.

honourable,



honourable, when religion had dwindled into mere ceremony and superstition, and when the publick teachers and instructors of the nation were not only exceeding profligate themselves, but taught others how to be vile and wicked, under the very pretence of piety and devotion to God. Worldly policy and carnal wisdom would have taught our Saviour, had he been disposed to listen to it, not to irritate so powerful a body of men against himself, by directly opposing their maxims and practices; but to have taught a religion pliable and yielding to the passions and inclinations of men, to have adapted it at least to the prevailing prejudices, manners and vices of the times in which he lived, and to have so qualified and formed it, as to have secured the countenance, favour and protection of the rich and great, and flattered their hopes and expectations, without giving them too much trouble, and burthening them with too great rigour and severity of precept and discipline. I say worldly prudence and interest would have directed our blessed Lord to have formed such a scheme of religion, as the most likely one to succeed, and secure his own advantage. But instead of this he introduces a religion, and publickly preaches a doctrine, in direct opposition to all the prevailing customs of the times he lived in, that bid defiance to every vice of human nature, that allowed no quarter to criminal affections, sinful inclinations, or to any contracted habits of wickedness; nor any composition for any of the favourite indulgences

gences on which sinners are bent. Instead of this he publickly declares, that the very entrance into the Kingdom of God which he preached was by *repentance*, that to *all* his disciples who would enjoy the great blessings which he promised, *purity of heart* was an indispensable qualification. The great object he proposed to mens *imitation*, was no less than God his heavenly Father, and the measure of attainment he prescribed, as what should be the object of our constant ambition and endeavour, was that we should *be perfect as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect*. And amongst all the numerous instructions that he gave, and the various precepts that he delivered, there is still one uniform design pursued; the recovery of men from all the ruins of sin, and the restoring them to the moral rectitude and original dignity of their natures.

And how high a recommendation is this of the doctrine of the Son of God! How truly hath he hereby discovered himself to be the genuine image of his heavenly Father! Whatever comes from him must partake of his likeness. An impure doctrine, that leads to, and encourages sin, can never be of his inspiration, nor taught with his authority and leave. And though corrupt men want a religion, that is favourable to their vices, and will render them easy and safe in their criminal gratification; yet a religion thus suited to their taste, would on this very account discover itself to be a falshood and imposture, and  
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by its dissimilitude and contrariety to his nature, would carry its own proof, that it had not its original from God. And though the doctrine of Christ can never be relished by men of loose dispositions and profligate lives, and is never likely to gain profelytes from persons that are at all events determined to be vicious, and can never be cordially embraced by those who form their judgment of things under the bias of strong inclinations and sensual appetites; yet to all sensible, impartial, rational judges, this doctrine of Christ must appear highly venerable, worthy its claim of a divine original, and deserving all acceptation, for this very reason, its tendency to correct all the moral errors of human nature, to extirpate out of our frame all the seeds of vice, to restore us to that noble simplicity, that intire rectitude, that divine image, in which man was originally created, the forfeiture of which was the forfeiture of his honour, and the loss of every thing that was most excellent and glorious in his nature. Here Christianity triumphs without a rival, throws out a lustre, that hath no spot to obscure it, and shews itself to be the favourite offspring of that God *who is light itself, and in whom there is no darkness at all.*

7. I may add, as another peculiar character of the doctrine of Christ, the *compleatness* and *absolute perfection* of it, so that 'tis in nothing defective, relating either to its *principles, duties, motives and encouragements.* There is not one single *principle*, upon which the knowledge or practice of true religion depends, but what

he taught; not one worthy *disposition* of the rational mind but what he recommended, not one single virtue essential to human nature that he did not enforce, nor any one *consideration* of any importance, suited to the nature of religion, and fit to form the temper, and influence the conduct of mankind, that he did not hold up to their view. He did not indeed derive his motives to the spiritual worship of God, to mens governing their passions, and living soberly, righteously and godly in the present world, from the secular advantages of riches, honours and pleasures; because these too often are inconsistent with the prosperity of religion; nor did he apply or recommend the terrors of human punishment to bring men to his faith, and recover them from errors; because such an application is in its nature improper, and not conducive to promote conviction, and that inward firm persuasion of the heart, which alone is acceptable to and required by him. Bating all these spurious and unworthy motives to religion and virtue, 'tis impossible for the imagination or reason of man to find out a single one, worthy to support the cause of piety and virtue, that his doctrine doth not suggest, that his word doth not enforce upon our consciences; and this without any mixture of falsehood, superstition, or a single circumstance, that betrays the foible of human nature, and shews the imperfection of the spirit and wisdom that guided him.

And this is the more remarkable, considering the infinite varieties of religion that then obtain'd



obtain'd in the world, the gross corruptions introduced into the religion of the *Jews*, and the innumerable superstitions that prevailed amongst all the nations of the earth, and the contrary errors that were taught by the wise and learned men of those times, who differed not more from each other, than they did from the truth, and who with all their wisdom, were never able to form a plan of rational religion, or to enforce it by those motives, that alone are capable to give life and power to the most excellent principles and precepts. In the midst of all these corruptions, these differences of sentiments, these innumerable forms of superstition, our blessed Lord appears in the world, worthy the character of the only begotten of the Father, *full of grace and truth*, and in the short ministry of about three years, taught his disciples, all that were willing to hear him, so perfect a scheme of religion, as made up all that was defective, or misrepresented in the *Mosaick* dispensation, and conducted men by an infallible clew through all the intricate mazes, that the *superstition of nations*, or the *subtleties of philosophy* had created, and that guided men into those sentiments and practices, which if they embrace and follow, are an absolute security from the seduction of error, and what generally attends it, the corruption, and the guilt of vice. And so perfect is this constitution, that after the examination of many centuries, the strictest inquiries made into it by friends and enemies, and the utmost good will that hath been shewn to lessen its credit, and

and destroy its authority, to shew its doctrines false, or its precepts defective; yet it still continues to triumph over all opposition; and though it loses its hold in this age of universal degeneracy, in the ignorant, unexperienced, unformed, and profligate part of mankind, yet it prevails, and ever will prevail whilst learning, candor, impartiality, just sentiments of religion, a due veneration for God, and a becoming concern for mens own salvation, shall continue to impress and influence them. And the objections that have been made to its particular doctrines and precepts, have discovered little more than the ignorance and want of reading in those who have urged them, as they are founded in mistake, and are all capable of the most certain and convincing solution. And therefore I farther add

8. As another excellency of our blessed Lord's doctrine, that 'tis *eternal and immutable*, and can't alter with times and circumstances, nor ever be exchanged for a more excellent and perfect scheme. Truth is unalterable in its nature, and arises out of the constitution of things themselves, and therefore can never cease to be what it is, nor alter from what it once was, throughout the longest possible succession of ages. The *doctrines* he taught can never lose any thing of their original certainty, become precarious, nor ever degenerate into errors and falsehoods. The *religion* he preached cannot ever diminish in its native excellency, lessen in its obligation, sink into superstition, or be exchanged for a more rational and wor-

thy institution : because whilst the nature and perfections of God remain what they are, and the relations in which men stand to him continue, the Christian worship must be the only genuine worship of God, and it is impossible the obligations of it can ever cease. The *moral*ity and virtue inculcated by Christ is founded in human nature, arises out of our make, and is the result of our various connections with, and dependencies on each other, and therefore can never be superseded or abrogated, or exchanged for a set of new virtues, of greater necessity and more advantage to mankind. The *terms of acceptance* with God, as settled by the doctrine of Christ, are such as are every way agreeable to the purity of the divine nature, the perfection of his character, and the ends of his government, such as are rational in themselves, and graciously accommodated to the imperfect state of men ; nor is it possible to conceive that the favour of God, as the moral governor of the world, can ever be secured, without *faith in him, repentance* for sin, and the *habitual practice* of religion and virtue. And therefore as there can be no reason for any alteration of this constitution, so there can be no just ground to expect it ; which, as it is founded in truth and equity, is rendered by the decree of God fixed and irrevocable. In a word, as he taught the way of God in truth, and spake those things only, which he had received from the Father ; as the truth was in him and no unrighteousness at all, his words shall

shall endure for ever, even that word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

And the plain inference from this immutable nature of Christ's doctrine is, that we should be *stedfast and immoveable* in our adherence to the profession of it; and never suffer ourselves to be seduced by the arts of men, that *lie in wait to deceive*, from our constancy in, and fidelity to our Lord Jesus Christ. Many are the objections that subtle and artful men may raise against the most obvious truths, so as to puzzle and render almost dubious even demonstration itself. But there is one plain answer to them all; that when one false principle of religion can be proved to belong to the doctrine of Christ, or one evident and incontestible superstition shewn to be inculcated, as a genuine and necessary instance of piety; when the morality of Christ can be proved defective or corrupt, or the Christian hope demonstrated to be impossible and delusive; when the facts of Christ's miracles can be shewn to be imposture, or the truth of his resurrection can be satisfactorily disproved; and after all this, when a better, more rational, useful, and advantageous scheme of religion and morals, can be found out than what Christianity contains; it will be then time to think of disregarding it, and renouncing all our hopes and expectations by it. The character of immutable and eternal truth impressed on the gospel doctrine, is a substantial proof that it comes from the immutable God. If this doctrine dwells in us, forms our temper and in-



fluences our lives, the blessed effect must be a real disposition for true happiness, and for all the rewards the wisdom and goodness of God have to bestow, in that eternal world that is before us. And 'tis folly and madness to part with a religion which thus prepares us for immortal blessedness and glory, upon the account of some lesser difficulties and objections which attend it, without something in the room of it, that is intirely free from these, and attended with greater certainty and clearer demonstration. But this will not easily or soon be the case. If we may form a judgment, from what the men of reason have substituted in our times in the room, it appears; that they are able to produce no principles of certain truth, but what are the certain principles of Christianity; and that whatever they have advanced to the contrary, or to *more* than it teaches, is partly *dubious*, and in part undoubtedly *false*. They have no rational hopes but what we have upon much better grounds, and if greater *liberties* are consistent with their scheme than with ours, 'tis a demonstration that their scheme is more *precarious*, and carries them farther off than ours from the mark of happiness and salvation. Be ye therefore established in the grace of God, and *cast not away your confidence of faith and hope in Christ Jesus, which bath great recompence of reward*. Remember that the *end of your faith is the salvation of your souls*, and that your great work as Christians, is by *patient continuance in well doing to seek for glory, honour and immortality*. Pursue this blessed prospect.

prospect. Keep it continually in view, and whatever inducements you may meet with to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, to forsake your principle or duty as Christians, break the force of them with those words of *Peter* in answer to *Christ's* question: *Will ye also go away? Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.* Let me add

9. That there is a perfect *harmony* and *consistency* in the whole of our Saviour's doctrine and instruction. Though he spake on a great variety of subjects, and discoursed frequently of such as were sublime in their nature, and as to which the persons to whom he spoke had no conception, or a false one; though he was frequently beset with enemies, who endeavoured to ensnare him in his discourses, and spake without any possible time for premeditation and forethought, yet still *one spirit* of truth animated him throughout the whole of his ministration, and the whole of his doctrine was *uniform*; all the various branches of it are each dependent on, and consistent with the other; so that no one single principle can be denied, or taken away, without rendering his whole scheme maimed and defective. And when considered as one body, each principle relative to the other, and all of them connected, and mutually subservient to each other, they constitute such a perfect, regular and admirable scheme of religion and morals, as the world was never before blessed with, and as can never be exchanged for, or succeeded by a better.

It is morally impossible for *imposture*, however subtle and cunning it may be, or for superstition, which is ever weak and inconsistent with itself, to foresee or provide against all emergencies and occasions that may arise, and to form such a scheme of things as shall answer to all objections and difficulties, as shall support itself against all kinds of persons, of different factions, parties, prejudices and principles, and in all seasons, when suddenly attacked by artful men, or in circumstances of danger and threatening evil. It is not in human prudence to provide the proper expedients in all these circumstances, so as to maintain a consistency of principle and conduct; and the truth of this is abundantly confirmed by the behaviour of *Impostors* and *Enthusiasts*, ancient and modern; who have varied their doctrine as times and circumstances have altered, confessed their mistakes, or vindicated them in such a manner, as hath only discovered their impudence and folly. But as to our Saviour's doctrine, and what is still more wonderful the doctrines of his Apostles, those which they have more largely insisted on, or mentioned only occasionally or accidentally, malice itself can never fix on and point out any inconsistencies and contradictions, any change of opinion, or alteration of principle. Let whatever relates to the doctrines of Christianity, dispersed throughout all the books of the New Testament, be reduced under proper heads, and every thing relating to the same subject be put together, and considered in its proper relation  
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and connection; and it will appear that every part illustrates the other, and tends to make it more intelligible and rational. A consideration this, which every impartial man will allow greatly tends to support and establish the character of the divine original of the doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, considering the various occasions and controversies on which they wrote, their distance of place from each other, their original want of learning and education, and of all the arts necessary to render them regular and consistent writers.

10. Let me observe farther, that there is a *surprising wisdom and prudence* in what our blessed Saviour spoke, which appears in his converse with the Scribes and Pharisees, the men of learning and abilities in his days, who narrowly observed him, watched all occasions to betray and ensnare him, and put to him insidious and difficult questions, to draw from him answers, which they imagined and hoped must turn out to his disadvantage, and prejudice him in his interest, reputation, and character. His answers were such, as not only astonished the multitude, but put even his enemies to shame and confusion. When the chief priests and elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and asked him, *by what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?* Our blessed Lord, instead of answering them directly, in order to make them answer their own question, or to convict them of hypocrisy and wickedness, asks them: *The baptism of John, whence was it? From Heaven, or of men?*



men \* ? On this question these masters of Israel reasoned with themselves: *If we say, from Heaven, he will say to us, why did not ye then believe him, because he testified of Christ. But if we shall say of men, we fear the people, for all bold John as a Prophet.* Thus he prudently reduced them to a difficulty, either to confess him to be the *Messiah*, as *John* declared he was, or to own their ignorance, malice and craft; whereby instead of giving them any occasion or opportunity to insult or traduce him, he exposed them in their proper colours, and made them appear in their proper dress of dissimulation and hypocrisy. When the Pharisees, in order to entangle him in his talk, sent out to him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, under the guise of compliment and great esteem for his person and doctrine, *Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men: Tell us therefore what thinkest thou: Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not † ?* A question extremely subtle and insidious; for had he answered it was lawful to give tribute to *Caesar*, they would have traduced him as an enemy to his country, the pride of the *Jews* being risen to that height, as to bear with indignation the being tributary to the *Romans*, and to think that as the Holy Nation, and the peculiar people of God, the *Romans* had no right to tribute from them, and to look on all those with abhorrence who fa-

\* Mat. xxi. 23.

† Mat. xxii. 15.

voured the *Roman* interest, and justified the tax that they levied upon them. And had our blessed Saviour denied the lawfulness of paying them tribute, they would immediately have accused him to the *Roman* governor, and urged his punishment as an incendiary and rebel. And therefore our blessed Lord wisely evaded the snare, by saying: *Shew me the tribute money*, and when they brought him a piece of it, he said to them: *Whose image and superscription is this?* Upon their saying, *Cæsar's*, he answers: *Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.* Many other instances of this kind might be mentioned. I shall only add, that this spirit of signal prudence appears in several of the parables of Christ, in which he severely reprov'd the *Jews*, for their hypocrisy and cruelty, and threatened them with the severest judgments of God, in such terms as they well understood, but in so covert a manner, as carried in it the least offence, and gave them the least handle to reproach and to accuse him.

## S E R M O N IV.

*The Possibility of Miracles.*

JOHN iii. 2.

*Rabbi, we know thou art a Teacher come from God; for no Man can do these Miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

**T**HESE are the words of Nicodemus a Pharisee, and a ruler of the Jews, to our blessed Saviour; spoken from the conviction that he had of the truth of his miracles, and a serious consideration of the nature of them. He declares him to be *a teacher come from God*: because the miracles he did were such, as *no man could do*, except he was immediately assisted by the power of God. And this inference certainly is good, that if any man teaches doctrines in the name of God, and doth such miracles in confirmation of his doctrine as are effected by the immediate hand or agency of God, such a teacher is *authorised* by God; and the miracles he doth, under the divine influence, are God's testimony to the truth of what he teaches, and to the reality of his authority and commission from him. 'Tis therefore

therefore a matter of great importance to us as Christians, that the evidence for the truth of our Saviour's miracles be satisfactory and well supported; otherwise our faith in him well be no better than credulity, and all our expectations from him vain and delusive. And we ought to be the more careful as to this article, because there have been *many pretences* to miracles, that have had no foundation in truth, and could be nothing more than the artful pretences, or delusive practices of interested men, to impose on the credulous for their own advantage. There is scarce an historian, either amongst the ancient *Greeks* or *Romans*, who doth not entertain us with accounts of wonders, signs and prodigies, that happened in his own or former times. *Apollonius Tyaneus*, who lived in the time of *Nero*, and under the reigns of the succeeding Emperors down to *Nerva*, is reported to have raised the dead, to have healed distempers, to have foretold many events, and done many other extraordinary and miraculous things, which are justly esteemed as falsehoods and impostors. For near 50 years after our blessed Saviour and his Apostles, we find no pretences to miraculous powers, in any of the writings of the Apostolick Fathers during that interval, nor any certain and unquestionable accounts of any extraordinary works performed by the Christians of those times, for the confirmation of Christianity, and the conviction of infidels. But in the *succeeding* ages Ecclesiastical History abounds with narrations of this kind, and we have



have strong, explicit and repeated attestations of many gifts and miraculous powers, which as it is said were constantly and publicly exerted in the Christian church, through each succeeding age; and these miraculous powers, if we will believe the church of *Rome*, have been continued successively down to the present times, for the confirmation of her doctrines, and the utter confutation of all those hereticks, that have schismatically separated from her communion.

The *miracles* pretended by the church of *Rome* have all the marks of *legerdemain* and *imposture*. That standing miracle of the *transubstantiation* of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, is such an affront and *contradiction* to our *senses*, and to all the most certain conclusions of *reason*, as *destroys* every kind of evidence that can be brought for the proof of other miracles in confirmation of it; since 'tis impossible that a *contradiction* and absurdity can ever be *demonstrated*, or that God can give his testimony to the truth of a falsehood and *lie*. The *miracles* said to be wrought in the Christian church, *after the Apostolick Fathers*, have lately undergone a very free and severe examination, by a learned and candid writer; who hath, to say the least, greatly weakened the credit of them, and rendered the accounts we have of them liable to great *suspicion* and *doubt*; and 'tis no wonder, that some persons should draw an argument from hence, against the miracles wrought by our Saviour and his Apostles, and place them to  
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the same account of imposture and delusion. It is more to be wondered at, that any Christian writers, in their defence of the miracles said to be wrought after the apostolick age, should represent the evidence for them to be so strong, as that they cannot be discredited, without shaking the whole faith of History; an assertion, which if true, will be thought to shake the faith of the gospel History itself, and render all the miracles of Christ and his Apostles precarious and uncertain.

I shall not at all enter into this controversy about the truth or falshood of these miraculous powers, asserted to be for several ages in the church. This is a much fitter employment for the press than the pulpit. But as every Christian is nearly interested in the truth of the *gospel History*, and is concerned to be well established in the evidence for his belief of the divine mission of Christ and his Apostles, and in the reality of those miracles by which their divine authority is supported, I shall endeavour to shew you, that whatever becomes of these later miracles, which the Christian Fathers affirm and boast of, those of our blessed Saviour and his Apostles will remain unshaken, and that all the objections which are urged against the former, will not in the least affect the latter. This is a subject of common utility, and of the greatest importance to us all. And I shall

I. Consider the *possibility of miracles.*

II. The *nature of the miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles.*

III. The *character of Christ and his Apostles.*

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IV. *The end* for which their miracles were wrought. And

V. *The evidence* we have for the *certainty* of them.

I. I am to consider the *possibility* of miracles, and whether they are in the nature of things capable of being performed; since it answers no purpose to enquire, what kind of evidence there is for *any* particular miracles, if *all* miracles are *impossible*, and there can be no proof for what cannot be done; or it is impossible to prove that by any sort of evidence, which is impossible to be effected. And this is the doctrine of some *modern philosophers*, that all miracles are cheats and impostors, because in their nature impossible: But to this it may be answered, that to affirm the impossibility of miracles is an assertion impossible to be proved, because 'tis impossible to prove, that there is no power in the universe of beings equal to the working of a miracle; and therefore all arguments, and every kind of evidence, to prove this impossibility of miracles, must be fallacious and inconclusive, because 'tis impossible to prove such an impossibility. For

1. Consider that as far as *experience* helps us in forming conclusions of this nature, we may be assured from it, that there is a *power* existing, or real cause, every way *adequate* to the production of such an effect; whatever be the definition we give of a miracle. For if we define it to be an action visibly performed by *any being*, which is *above all his natural* powers and capacities to do, and which he therefore performs by the  
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immediate assistance of some *superior* agent; *experience* convinces us that there must be some agents or agent *superior to man*, that have larger powers than what he possesses, and may be capable of performing those miraculous works, which no man without such assistance could do. And whatever this superior power or agent may be, the whole frame of nature demonstrates that it doth some were really exist, because there are innumerable effects produced, above the utmost extent of all human powers to accomplish. There is some agent or cause, that secretly produces the bodies of all animals, and which though they are originally void of life, yet *quickens* and *causes them to live*; and therefore this agent or cause is *able* to give life to a dead body, *i. e.* to *restore* life to a body when dead, as well as to give life to a dead body that before never lived. There is a power in the universe that hath endowed minerals and herbs and roots with a restorative sanative virtue, to cure the distempers of human bodies, and to recover them to health and soundness; which is therefore equal to the miraculous cure of distempers, or the cure of them without these applications; because the very virtues of these remedies reaches to produce these effects, only by the efficacy of that cause to which they are owing; which efficacy therefore must be capable of producing the effects, without the use of the remedies; since whenever that efficacy is exerted, the same effects must follow from them; and therefore the miraculous healing of all manner  
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of distempers, though above the natural capacities of men, is by no means impossible under the efficacious assistance of a superior power or cause.

If a miracle be defined, as it is by a *late sceptical* writer, a *transgression of the law of nature*, by a *particular volition of the Deity*, or by the *interposal of some invisible agent*; the proof of the impossibility of a miracle can never be maintained; since 'tis impossible to prove that the power of the Deity, or of such invisible agent by his permission, cannot extend to the production of such miraculous effects. For the power of Deity doth in fact extend to the production of effects, that are much *more extraordinary and wonderful*, and which would be so esteemed by every man, were they as seldom and unusual as the other.

The love of *novelty*, and the passions of *surprize* and *wonder*, render men frequently liable to admit miraculous narrations without carefully inquiring into the foundation and evidence of them. And on the other hand it may be observed, that as what is common and ordinary raises no pleasing emotions of surprize and wonder, so it as frequently renders men inattentive to the most wonderful events which *continually* come to pass, and causes them to look on them with a kind of negligence and disregard, though in fact as really miraculous as any other that can be named; because the causes that produce these ordinary effects, are in themselves as inadequate and unequal to those productions, as the natural capacities of men

men are to accomplish miracles. The *laws of nature* are represented as fixed and unchangeable, and as producing their effects in a regular course by an unalterable necessity and force; and we scarce ever allow ourselves to wonder at any thing that comes to pass by the daily operation of these laws, because there is nothing *new*, and therefore nothing marvellous to strike and engage our observation and attention. But what are these boasted laws of nature, when they are narrowly inspected, and true philosophy comes impartially to survey them, and by what kind of agency do they operate in the production of their respective effects. The *vis inertiae*, or the power of inactivity is essential to and inherent in all matter, whereby it *resists any change* endeavoured to be made in its state, whether of rest or of motion. Experience tells us, 'tis without consciousness or thought, incapable of reflection, of resolution, of self determination, of art and contrivance, of every property necessary to denominate it a proper *agent* or voluntary cause, and of every power that is required to produce a series of effects regular and uniform, and that argue wisdom, design, contrivance and skill. And yet all the operations of *nature* are thus *uniform* and *regular*, and its productions argue *activity*, efficacious *power*, *contrivance*, and the most *exquisite art*. Now to describe all these things to unconscious, undirected, undesigning matter, is evidently to ascribe them to an incompetent cause, or to a cause disproportioned to the effect produced; and by consequence *all*

the productions of *nature*, if they are supposed to be owing to *merely material* causes, are as strictly and properly *miraculous*, as any kind of operations whatsoever of the miraculous kind, ascribed to our Saviour and his Apostles in the sacred writings, and when any of our modern philosophers can shew, how heat and air and water can diversify and direct themselves into trees, plants, leaves, blossoms, and fruits, how the fields cloath themselves with verdure, how the flowers paint themselves with various colours, what forms the body of an animal, what enlivens the dead unanimated mass, or what gives it spontaneous motion; in a word, how any one single appearance of nature is, or can in the nature of things, be accounted for rationally by any merely material causes; I think I may then venture to promise to explain and clear up, and rationally to account for, all the miraculous works recorded in the law, the prophets, and the gospel.

It is in vain here to plead the argument of *experience*, that the causes are adequate to the effects, because they constantly and regularly produce them; for the answer is plain, that experience only tells us, that the *effects are produced*, and produced by such and such mediums and instruments. But experience doth *not* tell me, that these mediums have *no* direction and influence of a *superior* power, to render them efficacious; or that these instruments have an internal self derived power, to exert themselves in those innumerable admirable effects, that are continually arising before

our eyes. Reason tells us the contrary, that what hath no proper power of action cannot act at all; and experiment and reason both tell us, that matter is void of this self moving principle, and never acts but when acted upon and in proportion only to that external power and force that acts on and moves it, and cannot therefore be the sole or principal cause of natural effects. If then *material* causes are *disproportionate* and *inadequate* to produce natural effects, these natural effects, to speak philosophically of them, are as truly *miraculous*, as any actions done by men; for the doing of which they have no adequate and proportionable capacities, and the *frequency* of these effects will by no means lessen their miraculous nature. If the Sun, in the lustre of a whole day, had never appeared to us but *once*, if the spring had never bloomed upon us, or the frost and snow of winter never chilled and shivered us, but *one* single season throughout our whole lives; every man would have confessed, and been amazed and raptured at the astonishing *miracle*. But because these things happen in a *regular course*, and in constant succession, our wonder ceases, and the only reason why we do not esteem them miraculous is, because they are common and ordinary. And yet common and ordinary as they are, as mere matter is incapable of producing them, as any system of matter is of moving itself when once at rest, or of procuring its own rest when once put into motion; or as that which hath *no power of designing or contriving*, is incapable of producing

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regularly



regularly an infinite series of effects, that all of them discover the most exquisite contrivance and skill. The frequency or infrequency of effects alters not the nature of them. Whatever is produced in appearance by an incompetent and inadequate cause is, properly and strictly speaking, miraculous; and though we have daily experience of the effects of natural causes, and not of miraculous operations done by men, yet if natural causes have no proper native self-determining efficacy to produce their effects, all that experience proves in this case is, not that miracles are impossible, but that some kind of miracles are more ordinary and common than others.

2. If indeed the whole train of natural causes and effects is supposed necessary and fixed, by an *unalterable* law, absolutely *independent of Deity*, which he can neither alter, nor controul; this will put us to some difficulty how to account for any miraculous effects, or such effects as do not proceed from the operation of these laws. But then *true philosophy* can never consistently urge this *objection* against miracles, because this is supposing the most *astonishing, unconceivable and unaccountable miracle*, and because an argument against the possibility of miracles, that is founded upon the certainty of a miracle, absolutely destroys itself. That the course of natural causes and effects should be necessarily established without the agency and design of Deity, that this would be, in the highest and strictest sense of the word, *miraculous*, appears from hence: That  
it

it supposes agency without any proper external or internal cause of it, necessity without a reason for it, productions of skill without any direction of them, determining powers without self-determination, regularity of operations without design, and inert, lifeless, unactive matter exerting itself in an uniform variety of effects, that require life, action and vigour to produce them. That is, 'tis ascribing the most wonderful effects to a cause absolutely unequal to their production ; or it is asserting the reality of the most astonishing miracle that possibly can be. And if this be so, as miracles have eternally been, and continually are performing, to pretend that a miracle is impossible is a contradiction in terms ; or to affirm that no other miracles are possible, but those which are effected by these ordinary laws of nature, is to affirm what can never be proved ; because the supposition of any kind of miracles, proves the possibility of others, and if some causes may produce effects which they are incapable of producing, you'll forgive the absurdity of the supposition, either, any, or all causes may produce effects to which they are unequal. The truth is, this supposition of causes and effects, independent of Deity, can never be maintained but upon the principles of downright Atheism ; a scheme so infinitely absurd and contrary to the most certain demonstration, as that it scarce deserves to be seriously refuted.

3. But if we take the *will* and *power of Deity* into our consideration, as the *great original cause*

*cause of the laws of nature, and establishting the connection of the ordinary course of natural causes and effects, the denial of the possibility of miracles will still appear more unreasonable and absurd ; because if all the powers of natural causes be in reality nothing but the power of Deity acting in and by them, as certainly is the case, then the power of Deity is equal to the production of those effects, as well without the concurrence of those causes, as with them ; because in reality 'tis not what are called natural causes that do properly produce such and such operations, but the power of God exerting itself by the mediation of them. It should also be considered, that God hath actually done many of those miracles, which are ascribed to our blessed Lord. He raised the dead by his Father's power ; and God in the beginning first formed man out of the dust, and then breathed into the dead inactive carcase the breath of life. Our Lord fed multitudes by bread and fishes created for that purpose ; and God, by whose power he acted, originally created the seeds of the earth and prepared food by his immediate power for man whom he formed, and replenished the seas and rivers with all their various inhabitants. What is the cure of deafness more than God's opening the ear to hear, or his restoring the blind different from his originally forming the eyes to see, or his restoring the maimed, the withered, or the cripple, other than his fashioning in the beginning the limbs and joints, for their proper uses, and with their distinguishing forms.*  
Other

Other instances might be mentioned, but these are sufficient to evince, that the most certain facts demonstrate, that the power of God doth extend to, and is sufficient to account for all the miraculous appearances of the gospel, and the pretence of the impossibility of these things is unreasonable and groundless. And indeed the single consideration that God is the great Author and Lord of Nature, that nature is nothing but the constitution of his wisdom and power, and the laws of nature, by which the whole system of things, and every individual subsist, owe their being to his will, and continue to exist, because supported by his providence; this abundantly demonstrates that all natural laws are absolutely subject to his controul, and that transgressing or overruling these laws whenever he pleases, is altogether as easy to him, as the fixing them at first, and the successive continuance of them by the never-failing influence of his providence. How awful is the power of God, to which nature herself owes her being, and continuance to be what she is. Remember that nature is nothing else but that frame of things which the wisdom of God contrived, the power of God brought into being, and his goodness richly endowed. If any thing else be intended by it, *viz.* a settled train of causes and effects, underived from and independent of him, 'tis a mere idol, vanity and dream, that subsists no where but in the imagination and conceit of philosophical Visionaries and Enthusiasts. All true philosophy leads to and



terminates in God, as the great original and father of all things, and after we have accounted for a thousand *phænomena*, by the fixed laws of matter and motion, yet the great question will still remain : *Whence came these fixed laws ?* And here, the only answer that can be given, after all our reasoning about them, is : *They are the appointment of the wisdom and power of the Eternal and Almighty God.* Having thus considered and shewn the possibility of miracles, both from reasoning and the most indisputable facts, I now proceed.

II. To consider the *nature of the miracles* ascribed to, and wrought by our *blessed Saviour* and his *Apostles*. And I confine myself to these, because though the miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament well deserve to be particularly considered, and will be some of them occasionally mentioned ; yet we are more immediately concerned in those done for the confirmation of the gospel, and if these amount to a full and clear proof of the divine authority and mission of Christ and his Apostles, the *Jewish* constitution will be abundantly confirmed : As it is plainly declared by them to be of a divine original, and to be fixed by God through the mediation of his *Angels*, and of *Moses* the servant of God. And I shall consider them under several views. And

1. They were *numerous*, and of *various kinds*, suited to the various occasions and different circumstances of persons, times, and places, to which they related. St. *John* describes their number in such a manner, as hath given great offence

offence to some over delicate criticks : *There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written every one, the world I think would not contain the books that should be written concerning them* \* ; in which words they imagine the Apostle to mean, that the account would fill more books than the whole world would contain. Poor criticks these that can find no other sense to this expression ; when there is a meaning of them strictly agreeable to the original import of the words, that is literally true, and an argument of the Apostle's modesty in this very description, *viz.* the account would fill so many books, as that the whole world would *not receive them*, would neglect them for their number, would, as the Apostle thinks, be apt to reject them, the account would appear so very large and incredible ; and the narration would be so long, as to prevent their diligently considering and attending to them. But even were we to suppose that the words contained a strong *hyperbole*, and the Apostle was supposed to intend only to point out the innumerable variety of them, by saying in a strong figurative manner, what I do not think was his real meaning, that the account would fill more books than the world would hold ; why should that be thought an exaggeration and false account in him, which would be reckoned a beauty in a *classical* writer. One of the best writers of *Greece* hath a much bolder figure in a perfectly

\* John xxi. 25.

similar

similar description. "The Heaven itself, saith he, would not be sufficient to contain them, was Jove to write down particularly the offences of mortal men" §. And another of them complaining that he had but a few days to compose an oration upon a very solemn occasion, declares "that the whole extent of time itself would be too short to form such a one, as the occasion and subject required" †. The *orator* meant only, that a great deal more time than was allowed him was necessary for his purpose, and the *poet* meant only, that the sins of men were almost innumerable. And in like manner the Apostle, that the miracles of Christ were too many to be distinctly enumerated, and exceeded all accounts that could be given of them. And this appears from the Gospel History itself.

He had the absolute command over *all the disorders and distempers of the body*, every where healing the *demoniacks, lunaticks, paralytick, dropfical*, those infected with the *leprosy*, distempered with *fevers, fluxes* and other maladies; though *obstinate, of long continuance*, and judged absolutely *incurable*. He restored sight to the blind, even to those who were *born blind*, hearing to the *deaf*, speech to the *dumb*, limbs to the *maimed and withered*, erectness to the *bowled down*, strength to the *impotent*, in a word, he cured every disorder, weakness and malady amongst the people. And what was more wonderful, he *raised even*

§ Eurip. apud J. flob. p. 8. c. 7. v. 8.  
Corinth. Ob. p. 27. l. 1.

† Lyfias Orat. in

*the dead, and such as had been buried, and lain several days in their graves. Besides this, he had power over the winds, stilled their fury, calmed the tempest, and restored serenity in a moment. He did in an instant what nature doth by slow degrees, turned water into wine, prepared bread and created meat for thousands. He had an absolute command over the spirits of men, drew his Apostles to him from their secular employments, by a call drove out of the temple the buyers and sellers with ignominy and correction, and overturned their exchange tables, without any one daring to resist him, and provided for himself the beasts for his entrance into Jerusalem, by procuring for himself the owner's consent, though at a distance from him. He expressly foretold distant events, and some of them at that time the most unlikely to be accomplished, and others that were soon to take place, such as the denial of Peter, the treachery of Judas, the desertion of all his Apostles, their persecutions by their enemies, the rapid success of his gospel and religion, the utter destruction of the temple, the siege and ruin of Jerusalem, and the singular vengeance of God upon the whole nation. And what was as truly miraculous as any thing that hath been mentioned, though born of obscure parents, and probably for some time employed by them in a low and servile occupation, without the advantages of education, learning, and reading, he surmounted all the ignorance and corruptions, the wrong prejudices and superstitious practices of his own nation, taught a religion rational and spiritual,*



*ritual*, gave precepts of the most excellent and divine morality, and enforced his doctrines and instructions by motives the most exalted and influential, and agreeable to the nature of pure and undefiled religion; insomuch that those who heard him, justly cried out: *Never man spake like this man*; even those who were *offended with him*, because of his country and parentage, yet could not refrain their astonishments, and saying, *Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works*†? And to compleat this short extract, he gave to his *Apostles*, and *seventy other disciples*, the power of teaching his religion, casting out Devils, and healing the diseases of the people.

From this account it appears, that his power seemed *unlimited* and *universal*, that men and devils, that the mind and body, the winds and waves, the powers of nature, and the operation of second causes, were subject to him, and that the miracles he performed were *frequent*, of the most *different* kind and *wonderful* nature. Had his miracles been *few* in number, or limited to any one *particular* kind, there would have been more occasion for suspicion of contrivance and art, of fraud and imposture. But a power that extended thus *universally*, and exerted itself in such a *variety* of miraculous operations, and to which the most astonishing effects were *easy*, prevented every kind of suspicion that they were the effects of

† Mat. xiii. 54.

collusion,

collusion, or wrought by any other power but the *divine*. In like manner the *powers* conferred on his *Apostles*, after his removal from them, were various and truly miraculous. Their *speaking instantaneously* the *languages* of many nations, in which they had never received the least instruction, and *conferring* these and other gifts upon the primitive believers, was itself a multiplied and complex miracle. *Peter* and *John* *instantaneously* *heal* one that was a cripple from his birth, and many other signs and wonders were wrought by the Apostles amongst the people. And though they were *imprisoned* by the high Priests and Sadduces, yet were they *miraculously* brought from their confinement, and publicly preached the doctrines, for which their enemies had secured them. *St. Peter* *instantaneously* *healed* *Æneas*, that had been *bed-ridden* with a palsy for eight years, and *raises* *Tabitha* from the dead by prayer. *Paul* the great Apostle of the Gentiles, *punishes* *Elymas* the Sorcerer with blindness, *cures* one that had been a cripple from his birth at *Lystra*, and might have received for it, if he would, the adoration of a God; he *dispossesses* the *Pythones*, *raises* *Eutichus* from the dead, *foretells* the danger of the voyage to *Rome*, *declares*, notwithstanding the shipwreck, that *all* should be preserved, *shakes off* a viper from his hand without receiving any hurt from it, *heals* *Publius* his father of a fever and bloody flux, and did many other special miracles, which God wrought by his hands; from which account of the apostolick miracles it appears, that they were as frequent as the end of their mission

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mission required, exerted on *different* occasions  
and objects, and *varied* as the circumstances,  
which rendered the performance of them ne-  
cessary and proper; and that our blessed Saviour  
and his Apostles, as they were absolutely *one*  
*in design*, so were actuated by *one and the same*  
*spirit*, in that miraculous attestation to their  
doctrine which attended them. But

2. It may be observed farther, that as those  
miracles were thus *numerous*, so they were per-  
formed on *all occasions*, without almost any ex-  
ception of time and place, without *previous*  
*warning* or notice, on a sudden, whenever any  
proper opportunity presented itself, or any va-  
luable end could be answered by it. Whether  
he was in *private* or *publick*, in the *synagogues*  
or *temple*, before the *multitude*, or in presence  
of his *enemies*, in the *cities*, *towns* or *villages*,  
before *Jews*, *Samaritans* and *Romans*, in all  
places, every where, at all times, this miracu-  
lous power attended our blessed Lord, and was  
exerted by him with equal facility and ease.  
And this will appear to every one who consults  
particularly the gospel accounts. In the *pub-  
lick synagogue* he cast out devils, and restored  
the withered hand; in the *temple* he exerted  
a miraculous power over those who prophaned  
it; *amongst his friends* he converted water into  
wine, and before his *enemies* he cured the man  
that had been impotent 38 years, and cast  
out devils, for which they censured him as act-  
ing by a diabolical power; in the *wilderness*  
he fed thousands by miraculous bread; by the  
*way side* he gave sight to the blind, and found-  
ness

ness to the lepers; and in the city *Nain*, as he met with a funeral procession, he instantly raised the dead person, and kindly restored to the afflicted widow her only son. In a word, every place and opportunity were *equal* to our blessed Saviour, and the most cursory reader must observe, that in the whole account of his life and actions it appears, that he was never unprepared, never wanted previous notice, particular attendants, time for delay, favourite places, but was ready to exert the divine power that attended him, when and wherever there was an opportunity to do good, or it became necessary for the confirmation of his character and mission.

When these circumstances were wanting, miracles would have been *thrown away*, they would have appeared a needless profusion; and when no good end could have been answered by them, they might have been censured as ostentation, vanity, and pride, and an argument readily have been drawn from hence, that they were fictitious and delusive, and that God would never lend his power for the operation of *unnecessary* miracles, when no valuable purpose could be answered by the exertion of it. Hence it is said, *that our Lord did not many miracles in the country where he had lived, because of their unbelief* §; which St. Mark mentions in a yet stronger manner: *He could do there no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick persons, and healed*

§ Mat. xiii. 53.

*them* †.



them †. Though he had full power of doing them, yet he could not do them in this place, because it was *morally unfit*, the persons were not worthy to receive this divine attestation. Why? Because of their unbelief: “The very reason, says one, why they ought to have been wrought there”. True, if their unbelief was *curable* and *involuntary*, and they had not by the meanest prejudices rendered themselves incapable of conviction. But this was in reality their case. They had been witnesses to some of his miraculous cures of distempers amongst them, and had heard him preach in their synagogue, and were astonished both at his wisdom and works. And yet they were offended in him; treated him with contempt, and paid no regard to his miracles or doctrine. For what reason? He was not regularly bred, his parentage appeared low, and his occupation mean. *From whence bath this man these things, and what wisdom is that which is given to him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the Carpenter, the Son of Mary, and his brethren and sisters, are they not here with us?* So that in spite of their own conviction that he was an extraordinary person, they would not acknowledge him as such, and whatever he could say or do to prove himself a prophet, the single prejudice of his being a mean person to outward appearance bore down all, and determin’d them to reject him. So that he could not do any farther miracles amongst

† Mark vi. 5.

them, for the same reason that *God cannot do what is unnecessary* in itself, of no advantage to his creatures, or *unworthy* his own character.

3. We may observe, that the miracles of our blessed Saviour and his apostles were *mostly* of a *benevolent* kind, miraculous works of mercy and goodness, and that tended to the welfare and comfort of mankind. Under the law of *Moses* God made known his power by works of *judgment* and *justice*, and by peculiar marks of his *indignation* and *vengeance*, when the vindication of his providence, the honour of his government, and the necessities of the state, over which he immediately presided, required it. And such extraordinary judgments, when inflicted upon *suitable* and *worthy* emergencies, are as becoming the character and perfections of God, as any extraordinary mercies bestowed on private persons, or the public can be, when at other times he sees it fit to bestow them; just as in the natural world storms and tempests, and other elementary disorders, have a wise end in their permission, as well as calm and pleasing seasons, and the settled order and undisturbed face and course of nature, in the general administration of his providence. But under the gospel dispensation, our blessed Lord appeared with a *glory worthy the Son of God, full of grace and truth*. His name *Jesus*, the *Saviour*, was truly expressive of the nature of his actions, *who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil*, who was continually employ'd in the most friendly offices, and who

lent his kind assistance to all that came to him for relief, with a disposition fit to receive the mercies they wanted. When *John Baptist* sent his disciples to Christ, to inquire of him: *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* Christ returns him for answer: *The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them*†; leaving him to make the inference who he was, and cautioning him not to be prejudiced against him, because he did not deliver him from the power of *Herod*. *Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* Indeed his whole ministry argued the greatest tenderness and compassion to the miserable, as he relieved their wants, healed their infirmities, and dispensed the blessings of Heaven in the most free and liberal manner, agreeable to the declared intention of his coming, *not to destroy mens lives but to save them*; hereby imitating the boundless goodness of his heavenly Father, and shewing himself to be the true image and representative of the greatest and best of beings. And in like manner the miraculous works of his *Apostles* after him were mostly of the same nature, *beneficial* works of power, wrought for purposes of goodness, that the gospel dispensation might in the whole of it appear calculated as well for the relief of mens bodies, as for the salvation of their souls.

† Mat. xi. 5.

The *destruction* of the *fig tree*, and of the *herd of swine*; may seem *exceptions* to this rule in the conduct of our Saviour; and the *death of Ananias and Sapphira*; the *blindness of Elymas*, and the *power of St. Paul to punish* extraordinary offences in the church by immediate *distempers*, may appear contrary to this character in the practice of the Apostles. As to the *fig tree*, the causing it to wither had an *emblematical* instructive design in it, to shew his Apostles what extraordinary powers should be conferred on them, in consequence of their faith in and prayer to God, and was so far a miracle of goodness; nor was the causing a fig tree to wither contrary to goodness, any more than causing a stone to moulder into dust would have been, each being equally insensible of the change it underwent. And as the eating swine's flesh was wholly *unlawful* || to the *Jews*, and the keeping herds of them expressly forbidden by their ancestors, in order to prevent all temptation to eat it, our blessed Saviour shewed, by the permission he gave to the destruction of them, his *regard* to the *law of God*, and his *care* that the people should not transgress it; and the miracle would have been truly beneficial, had they made the right improvement of it, and had the ruin of their herd brought them to submit to his doctrine and authority, who would have amply made up their loss by the everlasting blessings of his gospel. The punishment of *Ananias and Sap-*

|| Grot. in loc.

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*phira,*



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*phira*, for hypocrisy, perfidy, fraud and lying, doth not seem to be effected by any instrumentality of the Apostles, and is to be considered not as a miracle wrought by them, but as an *effect* immediately produced by the *band of God*. The punishment of *Elymas the sorcerer*, for opposing the gospel, though an act of severity to him, was an *act of mercy* to *Sergius Paulus*, who was a much better man, and appear'd necessary to his conversion; and even this severity to *Elymas* was *tempered* with goodness; for the blindness inflicted on him was but *for a season*, after which he recovered his sight. And St. Paul's power to deliver offenders to *Satan*, was not for their destruction, but edification; for the *destruction* indeed of the *flesh*, their sinful affections, and criminal passions, that *their spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*\*. So that there is no single miracle wrought by our blessed Lord and his Apostles, but what hath evident marks of *goodness* impressed on it; whilst as to their *general* nature, they were altogether *benevolent*, and pure proofs of disinterested and almighty compassion and mercy. And therefore I would observe farther,

4. There was the greatest *propriety* and *fitness* in the miracles wrought by our blessed Lord and his Apostles, and the most perfect *correspondence* between his *doctrine* and *character*, and the *extraordinary works* they wrought in confirmation of them. It would have been

\* 1 Cor. v. 5.

in some measure an absurd and contradictory conduct, had *Jesus* the *Saviour* inflicted, in the course of his ministry, *destructive* judgments from God, and for this reason he would not gratify his disciples in their vindictive desire to avenge the rudeness of the *Samaritans* to their master, by immediate fire from Heaven. He came to reveal *on earth peace*, and the *good will* of God to man; to declare his eternal purposes of grace, the *exceeding riches of his mercy*, and to establish friendship and reconciliation between God and sinners; to give them the most friendly and encouraging promises in his Father's name, and to raise them to the most pleasing and lively hopes of an eternal heavenly inheritance. How unfit would the person have been for this benevolent design, who had been himself cloathed with *terrors*, who had been liberal in the inflicting miraculous judgments, and who on every occasion had armed all the powers of nature against mankind, and employed them as the dreadful ministers of the Almighty's *vengeance*. Who could have believed that he was sent as a *Saviour*, who thus appeared as a *destroyer*; or that God would establish a covenant of *mercy* with mankind, that was introduced by a relentless and inflexible *severity*? A different conduct surely became the great messenger and revealer of the philanthropy, *the love of God to mankind*, and other works were suitable to the god-like design of restoring mankind to themselves, their happiness and their God; works of mercy, miracles of favour, power exerted for the most

benevolent purposes ; that there might be an unity and harmony in the whole scheme, and the *design* and the *means* to accomplish it might have a perfect resemblance and conformity to each other. As his great office was to be that of a *teacher* and *instructor* in truth and righteousness, and as all his disciples were to be purely *voluntary*, and compelled to come into him by no other constraints but those of reason, conviction, love of God, affection for truth, sense of duty, and view of happiness ; the most *soft* and *humane* treatment of mankind became necessary to win them over to his instructions, and to gain that ingenuous serious attention to his doctrine, which was necessary to their receiving it. A contrary behaviour that could not brook contradiction, knew not how to have *compassion* on the *ignorant*, and could shew no patience to the infirmities and prejudices of mankind, would have driven all men from him ; or if they had dared to approach him, it would have been with the same terror and design, that the *Gergasenes* did, upon the loss of their swine, only to have besought him immediately to depart out of their coasts. Once more,

5. The miracles of our blessed Saviour and his Apostles had a *grandeur* and *majesty* in them, worthy the divine agency, and that carried in them evident signatures of the immediate hand and power of God. There is not a single instance which can be mentioned, that looks *little* and *mean*, that savours of human *juggle*, and the base arts of cunning impostors. To whom in reason can be ascribed the opening  
the

the eyes of the blind, the unloosing the ears of the deaf, and the loosing the tongue of the dumb, but to him that *formed* these organs of sense, and who alone can restore them when absolutely lost? Who can feed thousands by a miracle, but he only, *who provides bread for the eater and seed for the sower?* Can any one raise the dead but he who is the great *author of life?* Can the rage and tempest of the stormy sea be stopt by a less power than *his, who at first shut up the sea with doors, who broke up for its decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said hitherto shalt thou come and no farther, and here thy proud waves shall be staid?* Or any one stop the career of a whirlwind, or immediately lay its fury, and soften it into a pleasing serenity and calmness, but his all-commanding voice, *whom the winds and the waves obey, and whose ministers they are to do his pleasure?* Who hath power over the hearts and thoughts and resolutions of man, to controul them in an instant, but he *in whose hands are the hearts of all men, who fashions and moves them by his will, and who turns them easier than the rivers of water are turned by the art and power of man?* In a word, give any of the miracles of our blessed Saviour an impartial review, and you will see that the introducing God as the author of them is with the highest propriety, that they are all *worthy* the divine interposure, and that our Lord could ascribe them to no other cause, but the Father's working in and by him.



6. Lastly, I therefore add, that they were in reality of *the immediate operation of God*, and the effects of his sovereign and almighty power. This *Nicodemus* declares in my text: *No man can do the miracles that thou dost, except God be with him.* This also was the doctrine of the Apostles. Thus *Peter* in the opening of the Kingdom of God to the *Jews*, tells them: *That Jesus of Nazareth, was a man approved of God amongst them, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of them* \*; and in his sermon to *Cornelius*, at the first opening of the Kingdom of God to the *Gentiles*, he declares; that God anointed *Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil, for God was with him* †. And our Saviour himself ascribes all the works he did to his Father, as the great author and cause of them. *The works which the Father hath given me to finish bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me* ||; and more expressly: *The Father that dwelleth in me he doth the works* §. And it may be most certainly affirmed, that no less power than a divine could effect them. The enemies of revelation are so sensible of the greatness of the Gospel miracles, and of the evidence for the truth of them, that they have no surer way to support their infidelity, but flatly denying the possibility of all miracles, and impiously asserting that God himself cannot effect

\* Acts ii. 22    † x. 38.    || John v. 36.

§ xiv. 10.  
them;

them: A plain acknowledgment, that if they can be proved genuine, they can be ascrib'd to no inferior cause but God. And this indeed is the truth, that they are *real*, and were the *proper works of God*.

What are the powers of invisible spirits of a superior nature to us, and how far their natural capacities may reach to accomplish works of a miraculous kind, is a fruitless disquisition; because 'tis scarce possible for us to determine it. As to the miracles of our blessed Lord, what the power was by which he effected them, is determin'd to our hands; the *Father did them* by the agency and influence of that *blessed Spirit*, which Christ received without measure, and by these works the Father bare testimony to his divine character and mission. The works of nature, and the established course and order of things, are the appointment and constitution of God, which he hath fixed; reason would teach us, by laws not to be repealed, or interrupted by any agency but his *own*. And therefore whatever superior intelligences, of capacities more exalted than ours may possibly do, yet I think we may certainly conclude, that the laws of God and nature *bound* their operations; and that as they are themselves his workmanship, of limited powers, and dependent faculties, all concluded within the system of things that he hath wisely and powerfully, and for the most excellent purposes formed; so they are themselves circumscribed by the rules essential to that system; and cannot have any power of  
action

action independent of those rules, or of producing effects without the concurrence of their natural causes in the production. This was the case in the miracles of our blessed Saviour: They were such effects, most of them, as happen in nature, but produced without any *co-operation* of the *usual laws of nature*, and therefore must owe their existence to the immediate energy, active power, and efficacious will of the principal agent, without any intervention of secondary causes; a power that seems peculiar and appropriate to the Deity. *Creation*, or the production of somewhat out of nothing, hath always been one of the great *peculiarities* reserved to the will and agency of God, and seems to be the utmost stretch and exertion of power. And what were that bread and those fishes, with which our Lord fed the multitude, but the immediate effects of *creative* power? How came the maimed to be made whole, the cripple to be rendered sound, or the eye to be form'd and opened in those born blind, but by his *almighty* energy, by whom we are *all of us fearfully and wonderfully made*? And when we consider not only the *nature* of our Saviour's works, but their vast *number*, and the *season* and term of time throughout which he was continually exercising it, it will be impossible to ascribe them to any other competent cause but the supream; and the reasoning of the man born blind, whom he restored to sight, will appear fully conclusive and irresistible: *Since the world began was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.*

*blind. If this man was not of God, he could do nothing.*

The inference from the whole, with which I shall conclude, is, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.* And as God approved him by the most extraordinary miracles, hath exalted him to be a prince and a Saviour, and sent him to bless us, in turning us every one from our iniquities; let us submit to his authority, and accept of the salvation offered us, and cheerfully wait for the season of his second appearance, that when he shall appear we may obtain our compleat redemption, in the restoration of our bodies, the perfection of our minds, and our intire happiness in the presence and glory of God.



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## S E R M O N V.

On the Character of Christ and his Apostles.

JOHN iii. 2.

*Rabbi, we know thou art a Teacher come from God; for no Man can do these Miracles which thou doest, except God be with him.*

**H**AVING in a preceding discourse proved the *possibility of miracles*, and considered the *nature* of the miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles, and shewn the excellent greatness and peculiar propriety of these, I now proceed

In the third place to consider the *character of our blessed Lord and his Apostles*, which is of great consequence in this argument. For however *possible* miracles are in their own nature, and though the particular miracles ascribed to any person may be *worthy* the *interposition* and *agency* of God, yet if the *person* to whom they are attributed, appears to be one *unfit* and *unworthy* to be employed by God as the agent or instrument in performing them, this will detract from the *credibility* of his having wrought them, and render the account of

of the miraculous works said to be done by him, liable to the suspicion of falshood and imposture. For 'tis not to be supposed, that God will employ any persons for so extraordinary a purpose, but such as are fit and proper, and the least liable by their character to prejudice mankind against believing the reality of the miracles he enables them to do, and complying with the great design intended to be answered by them. Otherwise they would be wholly or in a great measure useless, as being attended with circumstances that necessarily prevent their credit and success; and so would give occasion for reason to infer, that they were fictitious and delusive. If the person reported to have done them appears *destitute* of the ordinary necessary natural qualifications of *discernment and good sense*, or if there are in his temper and conduct evident marks of a *superstitious, or enthusiastical* turn, or if there be reason to conclude him a *cunning, interested, vain, or profligate* person, feigning revelations from God, and miraculous powers to vindicate and protect himself in the indulgence of his passions, or to carry on any favourite scheme of ambition and power; these and the like circumstances will furnish too much cause for suspicion, that God would not invest such a one with supernatural abilities, nor make him his instrument in effecting extraordinary and miraculous operations. Let us then examine the character of our blessed Lord and his Apostles by these marks, and see if there be any ground of suspicion that can reasonably

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sonably be urged against them on these accounts. And

1. If we consult the sacred history we shall find no appearance of the want of *proper discernment, plain sense, and soundness of judgment* in any of them. 'Tis agreed, *that God will not employ fools* in any message of importance to mankind, nor render them conspicuous to the world, by using them as his instruments in the production of any miraculous effects, because this doth not seem consistent with his infinite wisdom and understanding. And the whole of our Saviour's conduct sets him above every reproach of this kind. There appears the utmost prudence in the whole of his behaviour, by which he escap'd the snares laid by his enemies to entangle him in his discourse, and render him obnoxious to the people and government. When the *Pharisees* sent out their disciples with the *Herodians*, with a subtle question about paying of tribute to *Cæsar*, imagining however he decided it, they should find occasion to lay an accusation against him; with what prudence and skill doth he defeat their malice, and triumph over their subtilty. *Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, what thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not †?* intending, had he plainly declared it *lawful*, to represent him as an enemy to his nation, and a betrayer of

† Mat. xxii. 16. &c.

the liberties of his people; or, if he had declared it *unlawful*, to have accused him as a *sedition* rebel against *Cæsar*. Our Lord perceived their wickedness and clearly determined the lawfulness of paying *Cæsar* his tribute, but in such a manner, as to prevent the malicious intentions of his enemies from reaching him. *Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money*; and when he had asked them, *whose image and superscription it bore*, and they answered him, *Cæsar's*; he replied, *Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's*, i. e. 'tis your duty to render to both their due. In questions of great importance in religion, the decisions he made were the dictates of truth itself. When one asked him to try his skill: *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?* What conviction doth the answer carry? *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*\*; hereby, with the most perfect judgment, representing these two great duties of the love of God and our neighbour, as of greater importance than the whole *ceremonial* of the law of *Moses*. In that intricate question, relating to the *resurrection*, about the woman that had married *seven* husbands, to which of the *seven* she should belong at the resurrection; our Lord's determination is ra-

\* Mat. xxii. 35, &c.



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tional and convincing: *In the Resurrection they  
neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are  
as the Angels of God in Heaven †.*

Again, what *strength* appears in the *vindication* he made of himself against the charges of his enemies! when the *Pharisees* censured him for *eating and conversing with publicans and sinners* ||, what justice and what a spirit of benevolence breathes in his defence! *They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Go ye, and learn what that means: I will have mercy and not sacrifice. I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.* It would be to transcribe the gospel, to enumerate all the instances of this nature. What propriety, what nature, what instruction, what severe reproof, what skill and prudence were there, in the several *parables* that he delivered, whereby the most important truths were conveyed in such a manner as carried full conviction, and was least liable to irritate and offend! In a word, the whole of his doctrine, as to religion and morality, was of that nature as abundantly demonstrated his full acquaintance with and knowledge of these interesting and important subjects, and that he was on this account every way worthy to be employed as a messenger of God, for the instruction of mankind, and to receive those extraordinary attestations that were necessary to give power and authority to his doctrine, and this was universally known and confessed.

† Mat. xxii. 23. &c.

|| Mat. ix. 11. &c.

When he had ended that admirable sermon on the mount, *the people were astonished at his doctrine. Whence bath this man this wisdom* †, was the language even of those who were offended at him. His hearers all bore witness to him, *i. e.* confessed and publickly declared the truth of his doctrine, *and wondered at the gracious words,* the kind benevolent instructions that *proceeded out of his mouth* §, with wonder and astonishment, acknowledging: *Never man spake like this man* || !

In like manner may it be observed of his *Apostles*, that though when their master's doctrine was contrary to their inveterate national prejudices, they could not conceive how many of the things he taught them, were true, or could be so, as no man can understand what plainly opposes his former prejudices, till he is cured of them; yet they were men of *plain understandings* in all other points, *and capable of well executing* the trust and commission they received from Christ; as abundantly appears from their History in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and *their gospels and epistles*, that are conveyed to our hands. And though 'tis said, that when *Peter and John* appeared before the High Priests and others, *that they perceived them to be unlearned and ignorant men* †; it should be observed, that the word we render *ignorant*, should be rendered, *private men of no learned education*, that had not been publickly bred up

† Mat. vii. 28. xiv. 54. § Luke iv. 22. || John vii. 46.  
† Acts iv. 13.

in their schools, under the celebrated doctors and Rabbies; for the high Priest and his companions *wondered at their doctrine*, and the intrepid manner of their delivering it; and wondered at this, because having had none of the advantages of a liberal polite education, they could not conceive how they could speak in so publick a manner, and have the courage to plead so well in their own vindication. From their whole conduct it appears, especially after their becoming publickly the witnesses of Christ, that they were under the conduct of a spirit of the truest *wisdom and understanding*, however they came by it. But

2. As there is no just suspicion, that our blessed Lord and his Apostles were in the least *defective* in their *understanding*, or any part of necessary knowledge or wisdom, there is as little reason to charge them with a *weak and enthusiastical spirit*, or that they acted under the delusion of a warm and heated imagination, pretending to imaginary visions and impulses, that prevented the regular operations of reason, or misled their judgments into extravagant conceits, and wild, fanciful, unconnected and impossible projects. When *enthusiasm*, or the false imagination of impulse and inspiration possesses men, they are generally found to be the *weakest* and meanest kind of persons, and the disorder of their minds, and the distemper of their brain appears by a thousand instances; by *incoherent speeches, ridiculous doctrines, false prophecies, unconnected and contradictory*

*dictory assertions, wildness of behaviour*, and an utter want of every thing that shews the possession of themselves, and the proper decency, order and consistency of a rational, just and prudent behaviour. And of these effects of enthusiasm we have had former and later instances. The very *language* of such people is often a sad demonstration of the *frenzy* which possesses them, and wanting ballast of judgment, coolness of thought and justness of reflection, they are hurried away by every impulse that seizes them, and transported into every extravagance which their perverted imagination suggests to them. Enthusiasm always betrays itself by those kind of evidences, and being neither under the guidance of the spirit of God, which is the spirit of order and a sound mind, nor under the conduct of cool reason and consistent truth, it hath nothing to restrain its most violent emotions, or prevent itself from breaking out into the most *fanatical* and *ridiculous* excesses. And it would be easy to make this appear, from all the accounts we have remaining of the *ancient* and *modern enthusiasts*, to prevent the influence of whose conceits there is need of nothing but an impartial consideration of the monstrous and contemptible pretensions and effects of them. But 'tis to the honour of Christianity, its great author, and his Apostles, that their is no appearance of such a distempered spirit amongst them.

Our blessed Saviour did indeed *claim* the dignity of a *divine* mission, that the doctrines he



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taught were the doctrines of God, that his Father was continually with him, and that the works he wrought were effected by his immediate influence and power. And unless such a divine authority had been asserted by him, the claim to any miraculous attestation had been absurd. For what need could there have been of a miraculous attestation to one that neither pretended to be sent by him, nor to teach in his name. So that the *claim* of being the messenger of God, and working miracles in his name, argues the *consistency* of our Saviour's character, and neither can be separated from the other, without destroying the reality of the one, or the end of the other. But though our Saviour assumed this high character of being sent of God into the world, yet it was with such a *dignity, consistency, regularity and prudence* of conduct, as shewed, that *imagination* had no kind of *dominion* over him, but that his reason was cool and in its fullest exercise, that his judgment was clear, and passed the right censure upon men and things, and that all his intellectual powers were free and unfettered, and his mind in a state of the most perfect and uninterrupted liberty. Nothing of that *black and melancholy* gloom ever discovered itself in him, which is the prevailing tincture in the complection of some *Enthusiasts*; nothing of that *agitation, freak and whim*, of that fanciful, rapturous, extatick commotion and ardor that betrays the disorders of others. Every thing in our blessed Lord was *calm, temperate and manly*, without  
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irregularity of frame, impotencies of zeal, inconsistency of design, starts of passion, brokenness of thoughts, irresolution of purpose, contradiction of principles, temporary expedients, unsteadiness of conduct, change of measures, or any other single indication of a perverted and alienated mind. The claim of his divine mission he *steadily* and *consistently*, but *humbly* and *modestly* persisted in, without any pretences to multiplied visions, or extravagant, romantic, fanciful communications from God his Father. His *discourses* of religion were *solid*, *grave*, *convincing* and *affecting*. His *instructions* in moral virtue were *plain*, *rational*, *sober*, and carried force and authority with them. His *practice* was *answerable* to the doctrine and morality he taught, free from stiffness, pride and affectation. His *decisions* in questions of importance were *weighty*, *just*, and founded in the truth and reason of things. His *advice* *pertinent*, *useful*, and always suitable to persons, times, and circumstances. As a *Prophet* he kept up the *dignity* of his person and character. In common life he behaved as a *man*, and as one who knew human nature, and all the boundaries between good and evil. With his *friends* he was *social*, *engaging*, and *benevolent*. Amidst his *enemies* cautious. The virtues of men he kindly encouraged; their vices he reproved with freedom, courage and fidelity. Under *injuries* he behaved with patience, calmness and exemplary meekness. In *death* he manifested courage, submission to God, confidence in his Father's acceptance

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and love, and the noblest humanity and compassion to his cruel and relentless murderers. In a word, no one instance can be produced, in all the various parts he acted, of that discomposure, heat, unsteadiness and impotency, that are inseparable from a fanatical and enthusiastical cast of mind. Every thing demonstrated that he was in the fullest possession of himself, and that he always acted under the influence of the coolest reason, and the most sedate and solid judgment.

The same observations will hold good of his Apostles, who claim'd indeed the *honour* of being *his witnesses*, and acting as such by a *commission from God*; but who in the whole of their ministry acted *consistently* with *themselves*, with *each other*, and with the *design* on which their blessed Master had sent them; who made no claim to a spirit of revelation but what the most undeniable and convincing *facts attested*, and who in all their discourses, sermons, reasonings with those amongst whom they conversed, and circular epistles sent to the churches they had gathered, shewed great *strength of judgment*, *knowledge* of their subject, *skill* in their choice of proofs, and the methods of persuasion, *condescension* to the prejudices of mankind, *fidelity* to their Master, and a *religious prudence* and care to be accepted and approved of God; full demonstrations these that they were no deluded *enthusiastick visionaries*, and agitated by the suggestions of a false, capricious and brain-sick imagination. And though in one of the sacred books, that make  
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a part in our canon, there is a continued scene of *vision and revelation*, yet as there is an evident connected series and chain of events throughout the whole, as a great part of it is rendered intelligible by the labours of wise and learned interpreters, as many of the *principal prophecies* contained in it are fully understood, and *verified* by the most unquestionable events, as the various changes, corruptions, sufferings and persecutions of the church are therein graphically and exactly delineated, and the very power that is the great source of these corruptions and persecutions is described by the surest and plainest characters; these are certain indications that the author of these revelations did not deliver the conceits of his *own fancy*, but was under *his guidance* who hath all events under his direction, and sees them perfectly from the beginning to the end.

3. As there are no characters of *Enthusiasm* to be found in the temper and conduct of our blessed Lord and his Apostles, so neither are there any the least indications in them, of any tendency to promote the interests, and establish the practice of *superstition*; a corruption in its nature highly prejudicial to mankind, inconsistent with and destructive of true religion, and dishonourable to God the great object of our rational veneration and worship. Enthusiasm, or the false persuasion of visions and revelations from God, is one principal source of superstition; because as enthusiasm hath no spirit of truth for its guide, nor any



sure principles of cool and sober reason to direct it, but is the mere creature of fancy and imagination; its directions must be arbitrary and wild as the imagination that suggests them; and the practices it encourages and sanctifies be as irrational and absurd, as the disposition from whence they flow is distempered and frantick. *Superstition* is founded in *wrong principles*, and especially in *mistaken conceptions of God*, and of the *nature and duties of religion*, and discovers itself by false methods of devotion, and such practices in worship, as have neither the *reason of things*, nor the *authority and command of God* to warrant and justify them. It excites a fear of the divine displeasure for things that can never be offensive to him, and imagines that he is as easily reconciled by methods that have no intrinsic excellency and worth in them, and sometimes that are extremely *criminal and offensive*. It perverts the nature of true religion, or blends with it things wholly foreign to and inconsistent with the great design of it. It places it either in the belief of abstruse, difficult and incomprehensible speculations, or the absurd, contradictory and extravagant doctrines of men, or in external forms and outward ceremonies that are of no intrinsic value, or at best are but intended to promote some more worthy and important design. It instamps a sanctity upon indifferent things, and exalts them into an equal degree of honour and necessity with the most important and essential duties of Godliness. Its great intention is to  
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weaken the obligations of moral virtue, its constant tendency to cool and straiten the dictates of benevolence and charity, and the certain effect of it to waste and extinguish the life and spirit of rational, acceptable piety and devotion. It invents methods of compensation and atonement for the habitual vices of mankind, and is the most powerful antidote that can be administered to prevent real repentance and reformation: It is the great *engine* played off by crafty *politicians* and *secularized church men*, to keep the people in a servile dependance on themselves, and by which simple, ignorant and unthinking men are held in slavery to their own prejudices and fears, and often deceived into errors and practices, destructive of their honour, peace, and happiness. And considering the universal tendency of mankind to fall under the power of this evil spirit; should God lend his assistance to persons of this complexion, and give them the power to do miraculous works, the force of superstition must be *irresistible*, and the prevalence of it *absolute* and *universal*. And therefore I think we may lay it down as a certain and indisputable principle, that God will never arm vain and superstitious men with this dangerous weapon of miraculous operations, nor prostitute his own power and authority to countenance and support those corruptions of religion they would introduce and establish.

By these rules let us form our judgment of the *character* and *conduct* of our blessed *Lord* and his *Apostles*. When he appeared in the world

world, it was at a season when all mankind had fallen into the most extravagant absurdities of superstition. The *nation* to whom he was particularly *sent* were almost as deeply sunk in them, as the *Gentiles* themselves; and though they were of a different kind from theirs, yet were they not less groundless, or fatal to the interests of religion and virtue. Instead of worthy, generous sentiments of God, they had lowered him down into a sort of *local*, national divinity. Instead of rational sentiments of religion, they had debased it into external *form and ceremony*, and imagined that birth, a certain mark in their flesh, a few easy rites, the observance of traditionary precepts, voluntary abstinences, and an outward bodily kind of sanctity, was all necessary to their justification before God, and a sufficient atonement for all the sins and vices of which they could be guilty. Hence they were become a *nation of Hypocrites*, who under extraordinary pretences to peculiar sanctity practised the most enormous crimes, and were one of the wickedest people upon the face of the whole earth. The condition of the *Gentiles* is too well known to need any particular description, amongst whom, almost the very traces of true religion were lost; in the room of which ignorance, error, barbarity and superstition, had every where taken possession of, and enslaved the whole race of mankind. In these circumstances, what was the conduct of our blessed Lord? Did he fall in with popular prejudices, and strengthen by his doctrine  
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and example the corruptions and superstitions of his own times? Nothing so distant from every appearance of superstition, as christianity in its original purity. One grand intention of our Saviour's ministry was to lay open the hypocrisy and wickedness of those who were the great patrons and encouragers of it, to rescue the dignity of the moral law of God, from the contempt under which they had brought it, by their traditionary glosses, to shew the extent of it, and the folly of substituting any thing else in the room of it, and to recall men to the love and practice of the great essential duties of godliness and virtue, as absolutely necessary to their sharing in the benefits of the kingdom of God. And with what contempt and just indignation doth he treat those superstitious trifles, on which the *Pharisees* and *Priests* laid the great stress, and built their hopes of justification and favour with God?

His whole sermon on the Mount seems to be levelled against these sort of corruptions, and almost every beatitude and precept therein deliver'd is intended to strike at some perversion and misconstruction and abuse of the duties of morality. They taught that the breach of what they called the *lesser* commandments of God was of no consequence, nor attended with any marks of divine displeasure, that intemperate passion, opprobrious names, the study of revenge, impure and adulterous thoughts, divers sort of oaths, and hatred of enemies, were no sins, or peccadillos



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dilloſ that the law did not concern itſelf  
to ſuppreſs.

Hence all thoſe noble rules of exalted virtue,  
and thoſe Beatitudes pronounced on the inter-  
nal diſpoſitions of moral righteouſneſs, that  
are contained in the firſt part of our Lord's  
ſermon on the Mount. Their hypocrify and  
ſuperſtition were arrived to that height of im-  
pudence, as that when they gave *alms*, they  
proclaimed it by ſound of *trumpet*; when they  
*prayed*, it was *ſtanding in their ſynagogues*, and  
in *the corners of the ſtreets*, lengthening out  
their prayers by *vain repetitions*; that by this  
appearance of eminent piety, they might more  
effectually deceive widows and devour their  
houſes. When they *faſted*, they ſadned their  
faces, and *diſfigured their countenances*, that others  
might obſerve their great mortification and  
abſtinence, and were wholly intent by theſe  
means on encreaſing their wealth, and enrich-  
ing their families. They were *ſevere* on the  
leſſer errors of *others*, and *partial* and *blind* to  
their *own enormities*. Hence all thoſe divine  
admonitions to retirement and ſecrecy of de-  
votion, to ſeek after incorruptible treaſures, to  
moderation and equity in cenſuring or judging  
others, and to be exact, impartial and ſevere  
in obſerving and correcting our own miſtakes.  
They were ſo ſuperſtitiouſly ſcrupulous of ex-  
ternal purity, as that they would not *eat with*  
*publicans*, and ſuch as they eſteemed peculiarly  
finners, of which our Lord ſhewed the imper-  
tinence and folly. So ſcrupulous were they  
in obſerving the reſt of the *ſabbath*, as that in  
the

the judgment of these precisians, the *plucking an ear of corn*, or the *healing a distemper*, was to *profane* it, for which our Lord reproaches them, and tells them, *If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.* With them it was a heinous sin to transgress the *tradition of the elders*, but none to violate the *commandments of God*. Their consciences would not let them eat without washing their hands, and to eat any meat that they accounted unlawful was a greater crime than suffering their indigent parents to perish without relief. Hence he condemns these impious superstitions, and declares that eating without washing creates no defilement, and what rendered men impure in the sight of God was, an *heart* possessed with, and under the influence of *bad affections*, producing answerable vices in the life and practice. *These are the things which defile a man; but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man.*

In a word, the *whole* of our Saviour's doctrine, relating to religion and the conduct of human life, is so absolutely free from every thing that favours of *superstition*, that it is intirely calculated to destroy every seed of it, to eradicate every tribe of it out of the hearts of men. In like manner, what was the whole ministry of the *Apostles*, but an institution and provision to combat the superstitions and prejudices of this nation, and to persuade them to embrace a purer and more excellent religion, void of incumbrance, and free from every foreign

reign mixture ; a religion that might purify their hearts, render them honourable in their moral characters, and constitute them the genuine people of God, and the heirs of his mercy. This is the burthen of every epistle they wrote, this is the sum of their various instructions, to this all their precepts and doctrines tended, and to promote this design was the great end of their mission, and of all the miracles they were enabled to work. The whole discourse of *justification*, as managed by St. Paul, is levelled against this superstitious, fatal mistake, of men's being justified and absolved from their sins, and restored to the acceptance and favour of God, by the *ceremonious works* of the law of Moses ; a prejudice that had so deeply possessed the minds of the *Jewish* nation, as that one principal cause of their bitterness and rancour against christianity was, its immediate intention to destroy this notion, and to establish a surer and more rational method of justification, pardon and acceptance with God ; and therefore the Apostle hath more largely insisted on this important argument, as of the utmost consequence to religion, and on which the life and power, and all the saving effects of it, absolutely depended. And therefore christianity ought to be looked on, as the grand preservative appointed by God, against the prevalence of all kind of mean and destructive superstitions, and the great author and the original preachers of it to be held in the highest veneration and esteem, for introducing and publishing so benevolent

nevolent and friendly a scheme, that cleared mankind from all those pollutions and absurdities that had been for innumerable ages the reproach and curse of all nations upon the earth. But

4. Are there not marks of *craft, fraud* and *subtlety* to be observed, in the miracles of our blessed Saviour and his Apostles, which render the miracles ascribed to them justly liable to the suspicion of cheat and imposture? If this can be shewn, it will greatly detract from the credit of the miraculous works ascribed to them; since if they were endowed with a power of performing real miracles, there could be no need of subtlety and art, and one would naturally expect great plainness and simplicity in men who knew themselves armed with a divine energy and authority. The *Pharisees* seem to have thrown somewhat of this imputation upon our blessed Saviour, when they charged him with *casting out devils* by the *prince of devils*. The miracle they could not deny, and resolving not to acknowledge him as a divine messenger, they therefore impute it to a confederacy with devils. The more *modern Jews*, not daring to deny the miraculous works of Christ, account for them in a double manner; and say, that he went into *Egypt*, and there learnt the art of *magick*, by the help of which he performed them; and that having learnt the true import and right pronounciation of the name *Jehovah*, he was thereby enabled to do the most wonderful things. *Celsus* charges them sometimes to *fraud* and *imposture*,  
and



160 *Character of Christ and his Apostles.* Sermon. 5.  
 and at other times to the *magick* arts he had learnt in *Egypt* \*. The philosophical *Julian* allows the miracles of our Saviour, and says, "That he did nothing memorable in his life, unless any one should think, that the *curing the lame and the blind*, and *casting out devils in Bethsaida and Bethany*, deserve to be number'd amongst the greatest works †", and seems to impute these cures to his *skill* in *physick* §; but of *St. Paul* he says, that he was the greatest *impostor* that ever lived ‡. 'Tis evident from hence, that amongst the most inveterate *enemies* of Christianity, there was a firm persuasion, that there was *somewhat miraculous* in the life and actions of our blessed Saviour and Apostles, for which they knew not how to account, but by having recourse to the absurdest supposition of *magick* arts, a certain *mystical virtue* in the name *Jehovah*, or the delusion of *art* and *imposture*. The two former of these are too contemptible to deserve any answer; only I may remark, that the imputing these miracles to *magick*, and the virtue of the divine name, is a *confession* that they were of that nature, as to be above the reach of the most dextrous juggle and legerdemain whatsoever. And indeed the nature of our Saviour's works was such, as wholly to free them from every suspicion of this kind.

There might be *fraudulent* contrivances by artful men carried on to deceive others. They may prepare men to affirm that they were pos-

\* *Orig. cont. Cels. l. 2. p. 48. Lib. 1. p. 38.* † *Cyrl. cont. Jul. p. 191.* § *Id. p. 192.* ‡ *Id. p. 100.*

fessed, or lame, or blind, or afflicted with bodily disorders, and to declare themselves instantly dispossessed and cured, upon any given signal, or the pronounciation of certain words, agreed on before hand. But there must be *time*, and *preparation*, and *deep contrivance* to carry on frauds of this nature, and successfully to execute them. The objects must be chosen and fixed, and well instructed; objects not known to labour under long and incurable disorders, not offering themselves voluntarily for a cure, without previous warning and concert; not met with accidentally, not appearing in publick synagogues, and in the largest concourse of people, not in the presence of watchful, captious, artful men, who would not fail of narrowly inspecting into all circumstances, and soon discovering the fraud if there was one. *Imposture* is more *wary* and *cautious* than this, and fraud would soon find itself discovered and put to shame in such circumstances as these. And yet the *miraculous* power of *Christ* exerted itself, without choice of person, distemper, or place. His enemies presence no more awed him, than that of his friends. When and wheresoever he met with an object of mercy, he shewed it mercy, instantly, without fear of discovery, and submitted the nature of his works to universal notice and examination. And indeed there is so noble a *simplicity*, *plainness* and *freedom* in the whole conduct of our blessed Lord, such a perpetual assiance and trust in his Father's power and presence with him, such an open-

ness and conscious integrity in all he taught and did, such an abhorrence of every thing that looked like hypocrisy, subtlety and fraud, as that no character in the world was more distant from all reasonable suspicion of it. Not one single circumstance can be produced of any appearances of this nature, no one discovery of collusion and premeditated contrivance, that can be imputed to him, to impeach his character, or affect his integrity, or lessen the credibility of those glorious works which he performed.

It may also be added, that persons well versed in the arts of imposture, will, in the general course of their conduct, as well as in the particular deceits they practice, give sufficient proofs what spirit they are of, and of the fraudulent, crafty disposition that possesses them; by which, observing people will be guarded against their fallacies, and in little danger of being deceived by their pretences. Indications of this kind have been common to all these sort of deceivers. Thus *Simon Magus*, *Apollonius Tyaneus*, *Alexander*, described by *Lucian*, *Montanus* in the Christian church, *Mahomet*, and all the grand impostors of past ages, discovered the most evident marks of fraud and wickedness in almost every part of their behaviour, and thereby gave the strongest reasons to charge every pretended wonder and miracle to subtlety and art. Whereas the enemies of our blessed Lord, though they blasphemed his miracles, yet did not censure him for craft and fraud in any other part of his conduct,

conduct, nor lay this to his charge as the prevailing and distinguishing characteristic of his life. No. Thus every thing he said and did, abundantly demonstrated, that as *he did no sin*, so *neither was guile found in his mouth*. In like manner the *Apostles* of our blessed Lord, had been bred up in low and servile employments, and had no leisure or opportunity to acquaint themselves with, and make themselves masters of the subtle arts of imposture, which require long observation, frequent experience, repeated practice, and great assiduity, as well as quick intellects, readiness of invention, and dexterity in expedients, a fluency of speech, and other qualifications of like nature to practice with any tolerable skill, and probability of success. So that it was impossible in the ordinary course of things, that they could be any great proficient in this science and mystery of iniquity. And accordingly we find, there was nothing of craft and deceit, of ambiguity and double dealing in any thing they said or did. They spake *on a sudden* languages they had never been instructed in, in the *capital of Judea*, at a *publick* festival, and before the largest concourse of people. They cured a man that had been *lame from his mother's womb*, and whom every body knew to be so, openly at the temple gate. When examined by the priests and rulers, they give a plain, artless, honest account by whose authority they acted, and preach the doctrine of Salvation by a crucified Saviour. When commanded to preach no more in his name, they simply and resolutely,



164 *Character of Christ and his Apostles.* Sermon. 5.  
and without any reserve or guile, reply, that as  
it was more right to hearken unto God than man,  
*they could not but speak the things they had seen  
and heard.* They had no story to change upon  
any change of circumstances, but without art  
or quibble, or disguise, always gave one and the  
same kind of testimony, without regarding  
consequences, or laying in any salvos to pro-  
vide against futurity. No. Their whole hi-  
story is a proof, that *they renounced the bidden  
things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor  
handling the word of God deceitfully; but that by  
manifestation of the truth they commended them-  
selves to every man's conscience in the sight of  
God.* Again,

5. We shall upon the narrowest examina-  
tion find, that our blessed Lord and his Apo-  
stles were as free from every suspicion of *affec-  
tation, pride and vanity*, as they were from pre-  
varication, subtlety and fraud. *Vanity* will  
carry men great lengths to accomplish the  
views of it, especially the vain affectation of  
appearing singular and great, of being thought  
eminent for wisdom, a favourite with God,  
distinguished by heavenly communications,  
*honoured with a divine mission*, and sent for the  
instruction and reformation of the world. This  
is a character extremely pleasing to a weak  
*enthusiastick* mind, and that of all others best  
gratifies that spiritual pride and conceit, for  
which such persons are always remarkable.  
And though secular interested men generally  
look upon all pretences of this kind, whether  
real or fictitious, with contempt, yet they will  
not

not scruple to make use of them themselves, whenever they can make them profitable and gainful. And whether through weakness they imagine themselves to be really under a divine impulse, or whether through deliberate wickedness they assume a divine character they know they have not, the more effectually to accomplish their worldly ends; yet the effects will be in some measure the same. The *false enthusiasm and heated imagination*, will vent themselves in prophecies, and inspire the persuasion of a supernatural ability to do certain wonderful works, and even sometimes suggest pious fraud and spiritual deceptions, to carry on the designs of that celestial inspiration, of which they fancy themselves possessed. The *crafty impostor* will also have his visions and messages from Heaven, and dexterously play off his arts to surprize and deceive, that he may gratify his *pride and vanity* and other passions, by numerous admirers and followers. But in either case we may be sure, the hand of Heaven will never lend its assistance to countenance and strengthen these dispositions, nor choose such instruments as these to do those miraculous works, which instead of being of any real service to the world, would only tend to gratify their vain-glory, and swell them up to a higher pitch of insolence and pride.

But what is there in the conduct of our *blessed Saviour*, that can furnish the least shadow of a charge of this nature against him? His doctrine inculcates *humility and meekness*.

What he taught he declares to be *not his own, but his Father's who sent him.* As to his works, he openly confesses *he could do nothing of himself,* but only as his Father had given him a commission to do. He assumes and arrogates nothing to himself, but refers all to the *glory of another.* He reproached the Scribes and Pharisees for *loving the praise of men more than that which comes from God.* And had this been his character and complection, had he given the least indication of it, how easily might they, how certainly *would* they have recriminated, and justly charged him with hypocrisy, in censuring them for what he himself was as blamable. There is nothing that he appeared more studiously to avoid than every kind of ostentation; hence he frequently charged those whom he had miraculously healed silently to pay their thanks to God, and not to publish the benefits they had received from him. He never courted the applause of men, nor those external marks of respect and honour, which were so much valued and coveted by the Scribes and Pharisees. He submitted to the lowest offices of friendship and duty, and was himself an eminent pattern of that humility he inculcated. When pressed by his enemies to give them a sign from Heaven, and by *Herod* to shew him a miracle, he scorned to gratify their presumption, and refused the honours he must have procured to himself, had he answered their demands, and complied with their expectations from him. Had vanity been a prevailing passion in him, his whole conduct must

must have been different from what it was; for nothing is more evident than that all his measures tended to the disappointment of such a spirit, and to mortify the suggestions of it in every instance and view of it whatsoever.

Nor is there any thing in the history of his Apostles that can countenance or support such a charge against them. We never find them setting up *for themselves*, or acting as *principals* in their own name; they declared themselves to be the *servants of others for Christ's sake*, and thought it honour enough to be employed and commanded by him. When they had wrought that acknowledged miracle, of healing the man that had been a cripple from his birth, and the people looked at them with astonishment and a kind of veneration, they immediately disclaim the whole merit of it, and cry out: *Ye men of Israel, why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness, we made this man to walk?* And when Paul and Barnabas had performed the like miraculous cure at *Lystra*, and the people began to adore them as Gods; instead of being vainly fond of such an honour, as *Simon Magus*, *Apollonius* and *Alexander*, would have been, *they rent their cloaths and ran in amongst the multitude*, and instantly *stopped* the superstition and madness of the people, and undeceived them by telling them: *We are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you, that you should turn from these vanities unto God*; and unto him they could appeal before all, amongst whom they exercised their ministry: *Nor of men sought we*



glory, nor of you, nor of others. And when we might have been burthensome ||, or as the expression should have been rendered, when we might have insisted on the honour due to us, yet we were gentle amongst you, humble, condescending and kind, rather relinquishing the claims of respect due to us as the *Apostles* of Christ, that by a more affectionate and indulgent behaviour we might secure the success of our ministry and gospel. St. Paul may seem possibly in some instances to be an exception to this character, who writing to the *Corinthians* †, speaks in commendation of the dignity of his *Apostleship*, and even boasts of his peculiar and eminent advantages. But who ever will candidly consider that part of the *Apostle's* Epistle, the occasion on which he wrote it, the manner in which he describes his own boasting, and the necessity there was of vindicating his own character and Apostleship, will not only be pleased with the skilful manner in which he doth it, but will acknowledge even the modesty and humility of the man, even when speaking of himself, and saying the most favourable and advantageous things in his own behalf. Every one knows that circumstances may happen when self-commendation may be prudent and necessary, when done with modesty, and kept within the bounds of reality and truth. But once more,

6. Are there no appearances of a selfish and interested spirit, in our blessed Lord and his Apostles, that might suggest the expediency of miraculous pretensions, the more effectually to

|| 1 Thess. ii. 6.

† 2 Cor. 10. 5.

answer the views of *avarice* and *ambition*? I think *malice* itself will not bring this charge against our *blessed Lord*, whose external circumstances were extremely poor, and *who had not where to lay his head*, and who gained nothing of this world by his ministry or miracles, but hatred and contempt, persecution and an accursed death. What were the gains and profits of the *Apostleship*, that could be an inducement to the Apostles to continue in the employment, if their governing view had been the *enriching* themselves? They never pretended to give out oracles for *money*, nor were there hearers to *pay* for the instructions they received from them. A rich Apostle never existed; *they left all to follow their Master*, and he never led them to temporal plenty and abundance. Being in a state of continual persecution they had no opportunity for amassing wealth, but *approved themselves by much patience, necessities, fastings, and distresses*, and though they *made many rich* were themselves poor; and though *they had nothing*, were in their minds as *happy* as though they *possessed all things*. And therefore though God unquestionably will never give miraculous powers to men to enable them to enrich themselves, and gratify a sordid, avaricious spirit; this can be no objection against the Apostles being endowed with this power, because they appeared to have a *contempt* for riches, rather than a fondness for the possession of them; and never made any worldly advantage of their miracles, whether real or pretended, contrary to the universal practice of all impostors, who have ever calculated

170 *Character of Christ and his Apostles.* Sermon 5.  
their words and actions to impose on the simplicity and credulity of others for the enriching themselves. Lastly,

7. The character of our blessed *Saviour* and his *Apostles* for general integrity in piety and virtue, for exemplary holiness and universal goodness, are liable to no possible exception. As our *Lord's* doctrine was most exalted, his *life* was answerably pure, without any deviations from the path of righteousness, and unblemished with the stain of one single sin. Irreconcilable enemy to all kinds of hypocrisy, that in religion was his peculiar abhorrence; and in all that he said and did and suffered, he manifested the highest filial piety towards his heavenly Father, the warmest desire to promote his glory, the greatest diligence in executing his commands, and the strongest ambition to secure his approbation, and the heavenly reward promised him. In his conduct to others he ever acted in truth and righteousness; under the influence of a divine benevolence he went about and constantly employed himself in doing good and works of mercy. As a Prophet of God, and sent into the world to reform men, he reprov'd, without acceptance of men's persons, all their vices, exhorted them to repentance by promises of forgiveness, and threatened their impenitence with a severe and irreversibile condemnation. Over his own passions he had an absolute command, and ever kept himself within the bounds of the strictest moderation and temperance. Under the ill treatment of men, he shew'd patience, calmness, and forbearance,

hearing, and to the appointments of his Father the most perfect *submission* and *resignation*. So that he was not only *without sin*, but possessed of every virtue of human nature, and in this exceeded the highest attainments of the sons of men, and *equalled* the dignity of his character as the *Son of God*; finishing the most unexceptionable, amiable and godlike life, by a *death* that had every circumstance of *moral worth* to recommend it, that could not but be regarded by his Father, as the noblest and most perfect sacrifice that could be offered him. His *Apostles*, though *not equal* to their great master, for to his spotless perfection the weakness of human nature cannot now arise, yet *lived above all exception*, adorned the doctrine in which they instructed others by their own practice, could *appeal* to the world and God himself as their witnesses, *how holily, justly and unblamably they behaved*, and testified their sincerity, and finished their ministry, by *dying* for the cause of *truth*, righteousness and pure religion. So that though reason will never allow us to think, that God will ever employ wicked and profligate men, as his messengers, especially for the reformation of others, nor give them the credentials of miracles to support the character of a divine mission, which their vices would dishonour and render ineffectual; yet as the great *Author* of Christianity and *his Apostles* stand absolutely *clear* of every charge of this nature, reason can object nothing against the propriety of God's employing them, or giving them the sanction



tion of his authority, by the most extraordinary and miraculous interposition in their favour.

To *sum* up the whole of what hath been said. As in our consideration of the doctrine of *miracles*, we are to take into our view, not only the *works themselves*, but the *characters* of the *persons* who pretend to them; so we have seen that there was in our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* every circumstance concurring, to qualify them for being employed by God, as his instruments, to effect the most miraculous operations, if there was a valuable end in the scheme of divine providence to be answered by them; as they were persons of firm and sound rational capacities, as they appear to be entirely free from every tincture of Enthusiasm, as they had no fondness for, nor tendency to superstition, as there were no evidences of fraud in their temper and conduct, as they gave no indications of affectation and vanity, were not of a selfish, avaricious disposition, nor had any blemishes in their moral conduct, to taint their character, or cause the disapprobation of God; but, on the contrary, their principles were worthy, their religion rational, their tempers open, and their actions publick and free. They were modest and humble, benevolent and generous, and of a sanctity, exemplary and unblemished. We may therefore justly conclude, that God's fixing on them to be the messengers of his goodness and mercy to the world, and honouring them with the testimonials of miraculous works,

works, was by no means unworthy of God, nor inconsistent with the wisdom and views of his providence and government. I suppose had *human reason* and *prudence* been called in to assist in planning the scheme of human redemption, it would not only have suggested the impossibility of miracles, but the impropriety of such men as Christ and his Apostles, and dictated the necessity and expedience of sending on such an errand persons of good family and birth, of polite education and learning, of riches and plenty, of eloquence and oratory, and the like worldly endowments, to add a dignity to the service, and ensure the success of it. But the dictates of *divine* and *human* wisdom are *frequently repugnant*, and what seems prudent in men's eyes is censured as *folly* by God. Such is his wisdom, as that he knows the *best means* and most suitable instruments to effect all the purposes of his own good pleasure, and the *propriety* of sending Christ and his Apostles evidently appeared in the *success* of their ministry; and it will be found impossible to fix on any persons of different characters and circumstances, against whom the strongest objections may not be urged. As Christ and his Apostles appear from their history, which seemed penned to represent things purely as they were, in a plain unadorned manner, without misrepresentation or art, as from hence they appear to be absolutely unexceptionable in the whole of their character; we have reason to rejoice in the strength of this part of our evidence for the

174 *Character of Christ and his Apostles.* Sermon. 5.  
the truth of Christianity, and on which the whole stress of it may be said to depend ; for if it can be made appear, that there is any thing in their intellectual or moral character, that should render it a real impropriety in the conduct of providence to employ them, as his messengers to mankind, undoubtedly they never were employed as such, and by consequence could work no miracles to prove themselves such. And if, on the contrary, their character remains clear and without suspicion, and they were of such an integrity in piety and virtue, as the account on record declares them to be ; 'tis impossible but there must have been somewhat extraordinary and divine in them, nor can any upon fair principles deny, that they had those miraculous powers that are ascribed to them. And this consideration of the moral character of Christ and his Apostles, tends not only to the *confirmation of our faith*, but should have its proper influence to *form our disposition and behaviour*. For it becomes us to be *like minded* with him, who is the great *author and finisher of our faith*, and to *tread in their steps*, whom he hath employed to spread the knowledge of Salvation by him. And how much soever we may be Christians by *principle and belief*, yet if we are not such by *practice* and the virtues of a good life, we have no claim to the promised reward ; *for not every one that sayeth, Lord, Lord, shall enter into his Kingdom*, but he who calls him Lord, and honours, imitates, submits to and chearfully obeys him as such.

S E R M O N

## S E R M O N VI.

The Design of the Miracles of Christ.

JOHN iii. 2.

*Rabbi, we know thou art a Teacher come from God; for no Man can do these Miracles which thou doest, except God be with him.*

HAVING considered the *possibility* of miracles, the *nature* of those in particular recorded in the New Testament, and the *character* of our blessed Saviour and his Apostles, to whom they are ascribed; I now come to set before you the declared *end* for which these miracles were wrought, or the *design* that was aimed at and intended to be secured by them. For it is certain, that whatever were the nature of the miracles wrought, or the characters of the persons said to do them, yet they will appear utterly *incredible*, if *no reason* can be assigned *worthy* of so extraordinary an interposition of providence. Nor doth it follow, that because miracles are possible in their nature, and there is no reasonable exception against those which are ascribed to any particular person, therefore they



they were actually performed by him ; unless it appears, that some special occasion required them, and the views of the moral government of God rendered them highly expedient and necessary. For we can have no just ground for supposing, that God will ever exert any *extraordinary* power, or depart from, or supersede the ordinary laws of nature, which he himself hath established ; but for some *special* purpose, answerable to the means made use of to accomplish it, and which could not be so well effected according to the common and settled course of things. And therefore the evidence of *testimony* in such a case, let it be ever so well circumstanced, will not be sufficient to render the miracles reported *credible* ; because 'twould be a testimony to things previously and in *themselves incredible* ; because though miracles may be of that nature as not to be incredible in themselves, yet they are always incredible when *no proportionable reason* can be assigned for them, or a *certainly bad one* is actually pretended.

We may therefore unquestionably conclude, that no miracles pretended to be wrought in favour of *idolatry, superstition, and a false religion*, ever were, or can be wrought by any divine interposition or power ; because this is so far from being a reason to render such miracles credible, that it is the strongest one that can be offered to render them absolutely incredible. For as idolatry and superstition are destructive of all true religion, and highly dishonourable to God, and a reproach to human

man nature, and inconsistent with the dignity and happiness of mankind; it is *impossible*, considering the *moral character* of God, that he can become the patron of them, or encourage and countenance them, by exerting a miraculous power in their justification, or by assisting those, who introduce and would establish them, to do signs and wonders by his immediate interposition and assistance. This would be to act *inconsistent* with the *rectitude* of his own nature, with all the wise views of government, and with the welfare of mankind, as it would be leading them, almost unavoidably, into practices unreasonable, absurd and impious, contrary to the great and principal end of his having created them.

The whole account we have of *Apollonius Tyaneus*, shews him to have been a man addicted to the *meanest superstitions*, and the patron of all the Gods and idolatries of the Gentiles; as he worshipped *Apello*, *Æsculapius*, *Achilles*, *Palamedes*, and all the deities and heroes whom the superstition of the Greeks had consecrated. The whole account of his life was evidently written to support the sinking cause of *Paganism*, and, if possible, by a counter relation of miracles wrought by him, to put some check to the prevalence of Christianity, and to weaken the influence of the miracles of Christ and his Apostles. The *end* therefore of those extraordinary works ascribed to *Apollonius* being *evidently bad*, to establish the honours and authority of the *Pagan Gods*, and to countenance and support all the *follies and impieties*

of their worship; this single consideration alone is sufficient to discredit them, and wholly to destroy the belief of them. They could not be from God, nor wrought by the influence of any superior beings by commission from him; but were either done by the concurrence of evil spirits in opposition to God, or what I rather think, were partly *forged relations* by men that knew them to be false, and partly the *juggles* and *frauds* of an artful impostor, to impose on the credulity and easiness of illiterate and ignorant people.

If any of those miracles that are ascribed to the *Fathers* and *Saints* of the Christian church, were done in favour of plain and evident *superstitions*, and to support doctrines and practices, *contrary* to those taught and enjoined by Christ and his Apostles, to create reverence to *relics* and *dead bodies*, to establish the *intercession* of *departed* saints, to countenance the worship of *images*, the difference of *meats*, the honour of *celibacy*, the institution of *monks* and *friars*, *clerical power* and authority over the *consciences* and *faith* of the Christian *laity*, and such like superstitions and absurdities; this without any farther argument, is demonstration that they were not done at all, or could not be effected by the *same* power to which the miracles of Christ and his Apostles were owing; because 'tis impossible that the power of God can be exerted for purposes absolutely *contradictory* to themselves; or that Christ and his Apostles should settle *one scheme* of doctrine and worship, under the authority and sanction of

of divine miracles ; and a few hundred years after, certain persons called *Saints* and *Fathers*, should establish *another* scheme of worship and doctrine, *repugnant* to and subversive of the former, under the same authority and sanction of divine miracles. And therefore all the miracles pretended to, for the support of such doctrines and practices, were either mere *pretences* and *forgeries*, nothing but invention and romance ; or if the facts are so supported, as some men tell us, as that we can't deny them without weakening the faith of all histories ; then they were *after the working of Satan, whose coming is with power and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish*, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved \*. And for this reason, though some of the pretended miracles of the *popish* church have been proved to be nothing but the *rogueries* of their priests, and so render *all* of them liable to just *suspicion* ; yet was there no other reason to be alledged against them but this, that they are pretended to be wrought to prove *impossibilities* true, and to countenance the most notorious *corruptions* of the doctrine and worship of Christ, this alone would be sufficient for our rejecting them with contempt, and treating all the reverend dealers in them as spiritual impostors and wilful deceivers.

And as all pretences to miracles are absolutely incredible, and incapable of being proved to



be wrought by a divine influence and power, that are alledged in favour of purposes *unworthy* of God ; we may I think also affirm, that all such reports of miracles have a very great degree of *improbability* attending them, and are liable to very just and great suspicion as to their reality and truth, as to which there appears to be *no great and important end* to be answered by them, or no end but what may be answered as effectually without the operation of miracles. The laws of nature were originally fixed with great wisdom, and the affairs of the world were unquestionably intended to be, generally speaking, carried on by the due operation of them. And therefore there is a natural presumption arising in the minds of all reasonable persons against them, upon the first mention and report of them ; not from the impossibility of their being wrought, which can never be a suggestion of true reason ; but from the want of discerning any competent reason that requires them. 'Till this can be made appear, no testimony for miraculous facts ought to be admitted ; because no testimony can be made so strong for the truth of a miracle, as the want of a suitably worthy and important end to require and render it fit and necessary, is against it. 'Tis true God may do particular miracles by any persons, without informing us of the reason of them ; but should this ever be the case, yet it must be said, that one of the principal internal grounds of their credibility would be intirely wanting, and the assent to the truth of them would be pro-

proportionally weak and dubious ; not to add, that the end of the miracle as to us would be lost, 'till it was discovered, and there could be no good influence from it, to promote any valuable purpose amongst mankind, 'till the reason and design of it should be explained to us. Had our blessed Saviour and his Apostles been reported to have wrought all the miracles which are now ascribed to them ; and had there been *no end assigned* for the doing them, or none *answerable* to those extraordinary and marvellous works ; would not common sense have immediately suggested, Why all this *waste* of miracles ? Why all this pretended exertion of divine power for no visible end ? Or for such an end only, as did not need this mighty apparatus to accomplish it ? Hath God in his infinite wisdom established the natural course of causes and effects, and will he unnecessarily, *i. e.* contrary to wisdom, easily depart from them ? To have recourse to the *sovereign pleasure* of God, and to urge that there may be *secret reasons*, unknown to us, for the performance of them, doth not solve the difficulty ; because whilst those reasons are a secret to us we cannot judge of them, nor form from them any conclusions in favour of the reality of those miracles which have unknown, *i. e.* no reasons, or very insufficient ones alledged for the truth of them. Nay, the conclusion on the other side of the question seems to be the rational one ; that as there can be no reason to believe that any miracles should ever be wrought, but the *importance* and ne-

*cessity of the end* to be answered by them ; therefore where no such end is, or can be discovered, there can be no reason to believe the reality of miracles, whatever be the testimony to the truth of them ; because such testimony will want one essential ingredient to render it credible, and no testimony can alter the nature of things, or render that worthy of belief, which is destitute of the principal foundation to support it. Where the means and the end are *answerable*, the means are as credible as the end, and if I can perceive any design worthy of the miraculous interposition of God, as miracles are not in their nature impossible, so neither are they in this case incredible ; it being easy and rational to conceive, that the same being, who established the laws of nature for *wise purposes*, should act by other laws, or without the concurrence of those natural laws, when he hath *greater ends* to answer by varying from them, or acting without them, than could be effected by the mere mediation of them, or God's perpetually confining his own conduct within the circle of their influence and operation.

If God had created this world, *merely* to employ his skill, and to entertain himself with the infinitely curious and various movements of so wonderfully complex a machine, undoubtedly, as it was at first exquisitely contrived, so there doth not appear to us any good reason why there should be any variation from the original settlement of things, or why the machine should not be suffered to go on

on regularly and constantly, without any interruption or deviation from it. Or if it can be upon any certain principles of truth demonstrated, that *man is not a moral agent*, is not an accountable being, is not a subject of divine government, is a creature of chance, and hath no relation to or dependence upon Almighty God ; or that religion and superstition, virtue and vice, and all the instances of moral good and evil, have no essential difference, and are therefore alike regarded by God ; or that God exercises *no providence* towards men, and is absolutely indifferent what they do, whether they are wise or ignorant, virtuous or vicious, happy or miserable, saved or lost : I say if these and the like things can be fairly demonstrated ; I shall, for my own part, instantly come into the notion of the absurdity and impossibility of miracles, and rank all, that ever I heard of, in the same class of imposture and delusion, whether ancient or modern ; and not scruple to affirm, that there can be no valuable end of miracles, and therefore never any reason for believing any of them to be true. But as 'tis but a poor reason for God's creation of the world, to imagine that the principal one was to divert himself with the various operations and productions of matter and motion ; so I imagine that whosoever shall take on him to assign any *better* reasons for it, will, when he doth it, point out to us some *worthy ends* that may deserve the divine regards, and be really becoming his character, by very extraordinary interposi-



tions of his power to promote. For he who assigns the *true* reasons for God's creating the world, and placing in it creatures of different ranks and capacities, must derive them from the divine *benevolence, wisdom, and rectitude*, his intention of governing them by laws suitable to the respective natures and faculties given them, treating all of them, as considerations of prudence, equity and goodness shall direct, and promoting their happiness by all such means as shall appear to him the wisest and best. And therefore though possibly it may be extremely difficult to assign any reasons or ends for miraculous operations, that arise merely from the character of God, as Creator; yet such may be urged from the consideration of his being the benevolent, wise and equitable *Governor* of the world, as may make them appear highly credible, and worthy of all acceptance and belief.

The character of God as the moral governor of the world, is as awful and glorious as that of his being the creator of it, and 'tis no more unworthy of God to maintain the honour and dignity of his moral character and perfections as supreme Lord and Governor, than it is to support the majesty of his name and title as the universal creator. And therefore though we cannot pretend to say, when miracles are *necessary* to support the divine authority in the world, nor determine the *particular season* when it is fit for God to vindicate the honour of his laws, and assert his universal dominion over men, and call upon them  
to

to attend to their duty and interest, by extraordinary interpositions of his power ; yet *when* the miracles affirmed to be wrought are *evidently and wholly calculated to promote this end*, we can then discern a correspondency and proportion between the means and the end ; and if it should farther appear, that there were infinite odds, that the *end* could not have been *secured without the extraordinary means* to effect it, it will appear as certain, that the extraordinariness of the means is so far from being any objection against the reality of them, that 'tis a circumstance that greatly adds to their credibility, and renders the testimony given to them more worthy of our belief. For as their appearing *extraordinary* to us, because of their being unusual, doth not make them in the least more *difficult* of performance to God, to whom 'tis as easy to act without the laws of nature as with them ; so if they are no farther extraordinary than is necessary to render them *effectual*, the calling them extraordinary is only calling them *fit and proper* ; which must ever be the character of those means which it pleases God to make use of to accomplish the fixed ends of his providence and moral government. Now in this view of things, the miracles of Christ and his Apostles are beyond all possible exception ; the *ends* for which they were performed being *the noblest and best*, that God himself can propose, or the interposition of his power can possibly effect. The great intention of the miracles wrought by our blessed Lord were,

1. To

1. To *establish the truth of his mission* and authority from God his Father ; that he was really a messenger from him, and sent upon *that special and peculiar errand*, on which he declared himself that he came into the world. Thus our Lord himself expressly : *I receive not testimony from man only. I have greater witness than that of John\** ; for the works that the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me ; and therefore when they reproached him with blasphemy, because he said he was the Son of God, he vindicates himself by saying : *If I do not the works of my Father believe me not†.* But if I do, though ye believe not me, i. e. merely on my own testimony, believe the works, i. e. God's testimony, in those works, which I do by his power and in his name, *that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me*, viz. by that divine power which he exerts by me ; and *I in him*, viz. in commission from him, and as I act by his authority. But as his being sent of God would have been of little consequence to the world, had he not declared the *end and design of his mission*, he hath particularly informed us of the errand on which he came, and the same miracles that were intended to prove his mission, equally prove the intention and purpose of it. This in general was, *not to do his own will*, not merely to accomplish a scheme that he himself had formed, but to do *the will*

\* John v. 34—36.

† x. 37—38.

*of his Heavenly Father. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work* †; particularly *to fulfill the law and the prophets*, by accomplishing all things predicted in them, and perfecting the great intention of them, explaining the great duties of morality in their purity and extent, and settling religion and the worship of God upon their sure and proper foundation, and thus *introducing everlasting righteousness*: Agreeable to this design he came as a *light into the world* §, to spread the knowledge of divine truth, and give men full instruction in all the genuine duties and principles of religion and virtue. And as the whole world lay in wickedness, he came *to save mankind from their sins, and to call sinners to repentance*, and to rescue and save them from all the miseries and evil consequences of their offences; *to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised, and thus to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.* In a word, he was sent not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved; saved from the condemnation of death, restored to the hope of, and finally be made partakers of the resurrection to life and immortality. His miracles were intended to prove the truth of his mission from God for these important purposes. And therefore

2. To prove and establish the truth of his doctrine, which he delivered to the world as

† John iv. 34.

§ xii. 46.



the Messenger of God ; for indeed whatsoever proved the truth of his divine mission, proved also the truth and divinity of his doctrine, which he taught in virtue of that mission. Thus our Lord : *The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me doth the works* ||, viz. whereby my words are confirmed ; and therefore he adds : *Believe me for the very works sake* \* ; as though he had said : You need no other proof of the truth, but that attestation which God hath given to them, by the miraculous works I do under the influence of his power. But it is said, “ that miracles, considered as such, are no proof of any thing, but of extraordinary power, or that the person who doth them is assisted by some being superior to man. But power doth not imply truth, nor doth it follow, that he who can exert the greatest strength will therefore exert the greatest veracity” †. But to this it may be replied, that miracles considered as done by the *operation of God*, or the assistance of superior beings under *his direction*, though they do not prove the truth of any doctrine in the *demonstrative* way, or by any reasons connected with and arising from the nature of such doctrine, yet they do prove it by a method every jot as certain in itself, and as satisfactory as any possible demonstration can make it, and that is by the *immediate and special testimony of God* ; whose attestation to the truth of any thing is the highest possible evidence, because he can ne-

|| John xiv. 10. — \* 11.

† Sykes two Enq. p. 62.

ver be *deceived* in his judgment; nor ever affirm what is untrue for the *deception* of others. And such miraculous works, as *no man can do except God be with him*, are the proper immediate testimony of God to the person that doth them, that he is what this testimony is produced to prove, and that those doctrines are true, for the confirmation of which he appeals to God. For when any person teaches a doctrine as a messenger of God, and works a miracle by the immediate interposition of God, in evidence of the truth of it, such miracles prove the person to be under the immediate protection of God, to be aided and assisted by his power and influence, and to be eminently pointed out, as one worthy of the attention, credit and regard of mankind, because warranted, vindicated and justified in what he says, by the divine authority and power residing in him. In the testimony thus given to any doctrine, he who preaches the doctrine, and God who doth the miracle, are properly *one*; both concur in asserting the same truth; or rather, God himself preaches the doctrine by the ministry of the person who delivers it, by setting his seal of confirmation to the truth of his mission and authority from himself, and calls upon all, who hear his doctrine, and see his works, to believe in and obey him.

Many of the doctrines of our blessed Saviour are capable of *no* other proof than that of *divine testimony*, because the things asserted in these doctrines depend entirely on the

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*constitution and appointment of God*, and have  
no antecedent fitness or necessity in them, that  
could appear to us, from whence we might  
infer their truth, by any principles of reason.  
Thus, that Christ was a *messenger* from God;  
that he was sent into the world to be the *Sa-  
viour of mankind*, that he was the *propitiation  
for the sins of men*, that he is the *only Mediator*  
between God and sinners, that *he shall raise  
the dead*, that he is appointed to be the *uni-  
versal judge*, and that *life and immortality* in  
the *presence and heavenly kingdom* of God, shall  
be the recompence of our faith and perseve-  
rance in the Christian doctrine and religion;  
these are the doctrines that can be deduced  
by us from no antecedent principles of *reason*;  
because they have their foundations in the di-  
vine counsels, and in the resolutions of his  
infinite wisdom and goodness; and therefore  
can only be known by *revelation*, and the  
express testimony of God to the truth of  
them. Our blessed Saviour came into the  
world preaching these doctrines, declared  
they were not his own, but his Father's,  
and that he only spoke what his Father had  
given him in commission to teach. How  
were these things to be proved? He did in-  
deed appeal to the *prophecies* of the Old Te-  
stament, in which many of these things were  
expressly mentioned, and particularly declared.  
But still, it could scarce be made appear, from  
hence, with such conviction as would admit  
of no dispute, that he was the person pointed  
out by those prophecies; for the *previous*  
point,

point, upon which all depended, had not its proper proof, viz. that he had a divine mission and authority. 'Till this was settled, the concurrence of certain *circumstances*, mentioned in the ancient prophecies, in his person, was no proof that those prophecies pointed out him, because one *principal* circumstance would have been wanting, viz. that he was a *prophet* from God like unto *Moses*, and declared to be such by *miracles*, as unquestionable as those which *Moses* did. But when our blessed Saviour shewed the coincidence and concurrence of all these circumstances in himself, and had the farther evident attestation of God to the truth of his prophetic mission and doctrine; the proof, that he was the person described in the ancient prophecies, and that the doctrines he delivered were the truths of God, was satisfactory and decisive, and could not consistently with integrity be resisted by those who had this double evidence actually before them. The miracles therefore of our blessed Lord, as they were performed by the *immediate power* of his *Father*, were his *immediate attestation* to the truth of his mission and the divinity of his doctrine; and therefore an abundant confirmation of that religion which he introduced into the world, both in principle and practice.

In like manner the great *intention* of the miracles wrought by his *Apostles*, was to carry on the great design that their master had begun, to support his authority, and *propagate his doctrine and religion* in the world. His death, though



though predicted by the ancient prophecies, though submitted to for the most important reasons, and an essential part in the scheme of redemption settled by the divine wisdom and goodness, yet was such an event as the Jewish nation could not digest, nor probably reconcile with those prophecies which declared, that he should be possessed of an universal and eternal dominion. And had he *continued under the power of death*, it would have been impossible that he could have been the promised *Messiah*, because he would have wanted many essential characters under which he had been described. But his Apostles declared him *risen from the dead, ascended into Heaven*, and advanced to the highest honours in the presence and kingdom of his Father, in order the more effectually to compleat the great work of man's salvation, which he began by his personal ministry on earth. But how was this to be proved? Would their *mere assertion*, had there been every concurring circumstance of credibility in their character, have been sufficient to have gained belief in the world, to things of so very extraordinary, surprising, and at first mention, incredible a nature? If these things had been true, and their testimony to them worthy of being received, as they testified nothing but what they were actually eye witnesses to; their bare affirmation could never have conveyed that satisfactory conviction to the world, which the infinite importance of the things themselves demanded and deserved. How then must their testimony

to

to these things be *confirmed*? What farther was necessary to give them a sufficient degree of credibility, as the witnesses of their master, and messengers *authorised* by him to *propagate his religion* amongst mankind, with any reasonable prospect of success? Why evidently, some *divine testimony* in their favour, concurring with, and giving strength to what they declared themselves, which would overballance the natural incredibility of the things they affirmed, and render them witnesses above all reasonable exception.

And how wisely *adapted* was that miraculous attestation given them, to the *nature of the doctrine* they were to preach; viz. *Salvation by the crucified, exalted and glorified Jesus*? The *instantaneous gift of many languages* to them, whereby they were enabled to preach the gospel, to persons collected out of all nations, and thus as in a moment to spread the knowledge of it throughout the uttermost parts of the Earth, they solemnly declare to be the *gift of the Father*, by Jesus Christ, as the proof of his resurrection, ascension into Heaven, and session at the right hand of God. The gift itself was universally confessed. That it must be the gift of God carried its own evidence; and that it was given as a testimony to the truth of their doctrine, in reference to Christ, was undeniable; not only from their solemnly affirming it, but because they preached him in these various languages, and made no other use of them but to declare him and his religion to the world. When *Peter* and *John* healed the man,

at the temple gate, that was born lame, what was the *manner* of it? *In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk*; and when the people stood astonished at the miracle, and the men that performed it, they tell them: *That God had raised and glorified that Jesus whom they had killed, and that his name, his power, and they by faith in his name, had made that man strong*, whom they both saw and knew. Could any thing be a stronger attestation to the truth of his being alive, and in a state of great power and glory, than such a miraculous cure, actually wrought in his name, and by persons who declared that their power to do it was derived from him? In a word, as the *Apostles* constantly declared themselves to be his *witnesses*, witnesses to his resurrection and glory, and commissioned by God to preach his religion to the world, so they had the *attestation of God*, by miraculous gifts and works, in confirmation of the witness they gave; and the great *end* of all the miracles wrought both by Christ and them was one and the same, to carry on the *same design*, even to propagate and establish truth, religion and virtue in the world, and hereby to promote the knowledge and worship of the one true God, and the eternal salvation and happiness of mankind. The *end* therefore of these miracles evidently appears

To be every way *worthy of God*, of the interposition of his power and providence, to countenance and support. There is nothing in it contrary to the benevolence of his nature;  
for

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for the whole of Christianity is a scheme of *goodness*, and answers to the noblest conceptions we can form of the divine compassion and mercy, and cannot in supposition ever take place, but as the effect of the richest and most unmerited grace and favour to mankind. It is perfectly reconcileable with and expressive of the divine *rectitude and purity*, as the governing design of it is, the *repentance and reformation* of a sinful world, the recovery of men to their integrity and the rectitude of their nature, restoring them to the noblest participation of the divine image, and reconciling them to the practice of the most amiable and substantial virtues. It is inconsistent with no conceivable views of the divine wisdom and prudence. 'Tis a scheme of *truth*, and thus agreeable to his character as the *God* and lover of *truth*. 'Tis intended to recover men to that original state of honour and dignity in which they were at first created, to teach them the design of their creation, and engage them by the strongest motives to live up to it, and answer it, and so concurs with the great views of the divine *wisdom* in bringing them into being, and endowing them with their intellectual powers and capacities. It is in pursuance of the great design of the moral providence and government of God; to maintain a sense of his being and perfections in the world, to secure a reverence to his authority, to add a new force to his laws, to strengthen mens obligations to obedience, to maintain that peace and order and harmony in hu-



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man life, which he would have preserved,  
and to make men partakers of that happiness for which he originally created and designed them.

'Tis therefore an end extremely beneficial to mankind, and of the highest importance to their welfare and happiness. For the great design of these miracles was to establish and confirm that doctrine of Christ, which wherever it prevails puts an intire end to the prevalence of ignorance, chases away mean and absurd prejudices, destroys the very sources of all kinds of idolatry and superstition, and delivers men from the tyranny of base and destructive vices; and restores them to liberty, virtue, piety, dignity, and substantial happiness. It gives a most plain and perfect scheme of religion in all the essential principles of it, in the rational worship it requires, and the unspeakable benefits it ensures. It exhibits to us a plan of morality and virtue, perfect, exalted, and plain, suited to all the relations, various circumstances and conditions of human life, and introduces honour, benevolence, candor, justice, equity and charity, to the acquaintance and friendship of mankind, teaches them moderation, gentleness, self-government, publick spirit, and the preference of things great and excellent, and useful, to all personal interest and private claims whatsoever, furnishes them with the strongest motives to think of those things and constantly do them, rewards them in the observance of them with contentment, tranquility, chearfulness of spirit,

rit, joyous possession of themselves, grateful reflections, security of peace, liveliness of hope, and prospects the most transporting and glorious. And besides all this, creates in them a disposition for the happiness of a future state, and secures them an entrance into all the pleasures of a blessed and glorious immortality. And can there be any design more *friendly to mankind* than this? Would not one naturally wish, that such a scheme should be stamped with a divine authority? Should we not look upon miracles as well bestowed, and worthy the benevolence of God, when wrought in confirmation of such a constitution, as in the whole of it is calculated, to banish infamy, guilt, misery, and every species of ruin from the world, and to make human nature in character what it should be, and in possession and happiness every thing it can want, or reasonably desire to be? Consider farther,

How *generous* and *extensive* this beneficial plan of goodness is. *Wide as the habitable world*, and diffusive as the most distant nations of the earth. 'Tis no *party national* view, that is intended by *Christianity*, as the *Jews* would have had it; who were for confining Heaven and earth to themselves, and engrossing God almighty, his favour and benefits, within their own possession, and for having the sole property in the Kingdom above, and all the kingdoms and treasures of the earth below; could they but have persuaded our blessed Saviour to have been as selfish and partial as themselves.

He, though a *Jew*, of the *seed of Abraham* by birth, scorned to gratify this national prejudice and pride in his own people; went upon a more generous plan, taught a doctrine of universal importance to mankind, and a religion equally suited to *all nations*, and intended to comprehend within the obligations and privileges of it, persons of every kindred, tongue, and country throughout the world, that were capable of being recovered to religion and virtue, and formed into a disposition for eternal life and salvation, without any regard to, or intention to make any alteration in their forms of government, their civil constitutions, or any of their peculiar and discriminating customs and practices, as far as they were consistent with morality and real piety. Though God had wise and just reasons for *separating* to himself the *Jewish* nation by many miraculous appearances amongst them, and for their special benefit; yet this is in its nature liable to some kind of suspicion, and the obvious objection that arises in the mind is: Why this *partiality* to the *Jewish* nation? And why at the expence of miracles to confirm a religion, for that people only, to the exclusion of the rest of mankind? Questions not to be solved without the light of *Christianity*, and a view of the scheme of providence from the beginning to the end. But there is no manner of room for an objection of this kind against the doctrine and miracles of Christ, who threw down every inclosure that kept men out of the Church of God, opened the door for all  
 who

who were willing to enter, and *put no difference* between any persons throughout the world, but the great, eternal and immutable one, which arises from the *difference* of their *moral* characters, which is the only distinction that God will regard, and which shall be taken notice of in that day, when the state of all men shall be determined by the righteous judge, for happiness or misery, as their deeds shall appear to have been good or evil. As a religion of this extensive view carries in it an *intrinsic* mark of its *divine original*, and answers to the character of God as *universal Father and governor* of mankind, the miracles wrought in confirmation of it were of an universal benefit, and therefore *worthy* of that divine agency and interposition to which they are ascribed. And from hence we may very fairly and strongly conclude farther,

That the *end* to be answered by the miracles of Christ and his Apostles, was as *great and important* in its nature, as the *means* to accomplish it were *extraordinary and surprising*, and that there is the most *perfect correspondence* and suitableness between them; and that therefore if the end proposed was worthy in its nature, becoming God to promote, and conducive to the most excellent purposes; then the miraculous confirmation of it hath every circumstance of credibility in it. Since however *uncommon and wonderful*, 'tis not more so, than the *intention* of it was *great and good*; when God condescends to become the agent, the scheme he directs will be all consistent; and



as the design will be worthy the rectitude of his nature, so his method of effecting it, will discover the hand and power that conduct it. Allowing it, that miracles, as they are a variation from the laws of nature, are not, though possible, to be easily credited; as 'tis not to be supposed, that God will ever vary from his own constitution, and supersede the laws which his own power hath wisely established, but upon cases of the highest importance, and even where the general welfare of the whole world is concerned in it. I say allowing this, the miracles of Christ and his Apostles will rest on a sure foundation; because 'tis not possible in the nature of the thing for us to conceive of any end more glorious and god-like than that which these miracles were intended for; the restoring the dominion and authority of God throughout the earth, the cleansing his world from the innumerable pollutions that had defiled it, and the restoration of light, joy, purity, righteousness, life and happiness to all, who were willing to accept these invaluable blessings. Is not such a design as becoming the divine mind, as forming the design of an insect, plant or flower? If it be not beneath the divine majesty to perpetuate these by a constant exertion of his power, shall it be reckoned too extraordinary for God to concur in the establishment and confirmation of that nobler scheme, of the rescue of the rational world from destruction, reconciling them to himself, and forming them into a meetness for immortal blessedness?

bleffedness? What can be imagined a work of more dignity than this, more worthy the majesty of God, and the grandeur of his throne as the monarch of the world, or better deserving his interposition, or more loudly claiming his countenance and protection, in the exercise of his providence, or more answerable to the boundless perfection and absolute rectitude of his nature? If so, let miracles be as astonishing as can be imagined, the astonishment will cease, when the end aimed at by them is in view; or rather, both together will appear as one harmonious, consistent, amazing scheme of infinite wisdom and goodness, and cause the Christian, in the admiration of his heart, to cry out: *Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! Thou art glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, and wonderful in all thy works.* I would add once more,

That the end, however important and beneficial in its nature, yet was attended with those *difficulties*, and surrounded with those *obstacles*, as that 'twas *not* to be accomplished without the *miraculous interposition* of God, and must have entirely failed, had every thing been left to the ordinary course of natural causes and effects. 'Tis well known, that the state of religion and morality was extremely low both amongst *Jews* and *Gentiles*; amongst the former there being only the external shew, without any thing of the reality and life of it, and amongst the *Gentiles* the very appearance of true religion was gone, as well as the substance,

stance, in consequence of which *the whole world lay in wickedness* and vice ; for their religion itself had sanctified the vices of mankind, adopted them into her rites of worship, and taken them into her immediate patronage and protection. And as this false religion had been interwoven into *all civil establishments* of all nations, and had not only the *universal practice* of mankind to countenance it, but the *laws of nations*, and the *power of princes*, to secure it ; in such circumstances the effecting of a reformation in religion and morality, was a work of infinite difficulty, and to have accomplish'd it *without a miracle*, would have been in reality as *great a miracle* as almost any of those which contributed at last to the effecting it. Experience had shewn, that the *Jewish* constitution had not answered the end of its appointment amongst the *Jews* themselves, and by means of its *peculiarities*, had it been in other things ever so perfect, could never become the religion of the world, nor the means of saving it. The efficacy also of *human wisdom and reason* had been fully tried, and found wanting and imperfect.

At the season when Christianity was introduced, learning and philosophy were in their greatest perfection and reputation, and even that part of *philosophy*, which is of the greatest importance to mankind, respecting *morality*, was treated in the most masterly manner, with all the politeness and elegance of language, the charms of oratory, and the most specious appearances of argument and reason. It had besides

besides the advantage of appearing under the protection of the greatest name *Rome* had to boast of, and of having the sanction of the *Senatorian Consular* dignity, to recommend and enforce it. And yet what effects did it produce? *Rome* continued the *same*. Though she saw her Gods degraded into dead men, her rites of worship censured and condemned, her ceremonies, auguries, divinations, derided and laughed to scorn; yet still she retained them, nor was there any appearances of the least tendency to change her deities or ritual of worship, nor any reformation introduced by the skill and power of human philosophy, set off with the utmost art, and most elegant dress that human reason could adorn her with. How much more *unlikely* were *Peter* and *Paul*, and the names of the other Apostles, all *barbarian* to the polite and learned men of that age, to effect such a reformation? And yet they did *effect* it amongst multitudes of all nations, ranks, conditions and characters; what *Cicero*, *Epietetus*, *Seneca*, and other celebrated men found themselves incapable of doing. To what was this owing? What merely to their doctrine, their skill, and manner of preaching, which the world counted foolishness? No. They themselves disclaimed it, and part of the very doctrine they taught, *that of Salvation by one crucified*, as a malefactor, blasphemer and impostor, must have entirely prevented their influence and success, had they not been *aided by an higher power*, and had there not been the most evident and  
certain



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certain appearances of a *divine testimony* to the  
doctrines they taught. They faithfully wit-  
nessed to the *miracles* of their master, taught  
religion and *salvation in his name*, as raised  
from the dead, and glorified in Heaven; and  
what raised the attention of mankind, and  
caused them to hear and regard them as *true*  
*witnesses* of their divine master's life and death  
and glory, was, that *God also bear them wit-  
ness with signs and wonders, and with divers mi-  
racles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his*  
*own will.* By this concurrence and support of  
God with them in their ministry, they were  
armed with *courage and firmness of mind* against  
all the difficulties and oppositions of their  
mission, and how much soever their *outward*  
*man decayed* by the labours and persecutions  
to which they were perpetually subject, their  
*inward man*, their mind, their resolution and  
comfort *was renewed day by day.* By this they  
drew over numerous converts to the faith and  
religion of their crucified master, triumphed  
over their prejudices, ignorance and vices,  
established churches amongst all nations, and  
kindled that *spark* in the world, that gradually  
rose into such a *flame*, as in the event utterly  
*consumed* all the Gods and temples and idola-  
tries and superstitions of almost the whole ha-  
bitable world. And if this change in the  
moral circumstances of the world was an *end*  
*worthy* the interposition of God, the *miraculous*  
works by which it was effected had the greatest  
*propriety and reason* in them, because they were  
not only *suitable* to the greatness of the design,  
but

but in the circumstances wherein the world then was, seem *absolutely necessary* to accomplish it.

I hope those considerations put together will abundantly convince you, of the *credibility* of the gospel miracles, from their tendency to promote the greatest and most worthy design, that the moral providence and government of God can be calculated to answer. It would have been an insuperable objection against their reality, could no good account have been given of the reason of them; or had some common, low, and trivial reason been assigned for them. For why should God vary from his own constitution; but upon an occasion *equal* to a miraculous interposure? But in a scheme, were every thing corresponds and harmonizes, were there is *dignity of design, wisdom in the contrivance, benevolence in the end, and extraordinary power in the conduct*, and that power rendered *necessary* to secure the success of it, by the peculiar difficulties attending it; to object against the extraordinary power, is to censure the means only for their *propriety*, for that which is in truth the great evidence of their *reality* and *credibility*.

Let therefore this consideration *establish* your minds in the *Christian faith and profession*. 'Twill be full time enough for you to doubt of the gospel miracles, when any one shall prove to your conviction, that God's concern for his own authority and government in the world, to promote religion and virtue amongst mankind,

mankind, and to bring them to the possession of life and immortality, is *unbecoming* his majesty, and the dignity and rectitude of his character; or that those are not the governing *designs* of the gospel religion, in confirmation of which the miracles of Christ and his Apostles are declared to be wrought. Whilst these things remain unproved, as they ever will to the end of the world, the foundation of your faith and hope in Christ will be immoveable, and it will be *a credible saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save sinners.*

But then, as the greatness of the end for which he came into the world, and in confirmation of which he received power from his Father to do all his miraculous works, is one principal circumstance that creates reverence to his person, and credibility to his miracles; have we *seriously considered* this important end, and is it *accomplished* in us? Otherwise all the miracles of Christ will, as to us, lose their proper influence, and be wholly void of that effect, which 'tis the great intention of them to produce. The consideration of those may produce in us a general belief of the truth of the Gospel scheme, and preserve us from running the lengths of open professed infidelity, and yet the great aim and intention of Christianity be far from having obtained in us; which is not merely to produce *faith* in us, by the miraculous means of its confirmation, but to bring us to *repentance* for our sins, to *reform* us from  
our

our vices, to *reconcile* us to God by the dispositions of a good heart, and the habitual virtues of an holy life, and thus to *prepare* us for a better world, that we may finally be brought to the everlasting inheritance of it. Those are the great ends of all true religion, and evidently and peculiarly so of Christianity, which is not intended so much to furnish matter for speculation, as to amend, purify and warm the heart, to form men into the divine image, and *create them into all good works*. When it hath this influence upon us, the end of our blessed Lord in revealing it, and the great intention of God in the miraculous attestation he hath been pleased to give it, is effectually compleated. Our *salvation* is *begun*, the causes of our ruin and misery are removed; being made *partakers of a divine nature*, we have the proper disposition for happiness, and being brought home to God, we are secure of all the invaluable advantages of his friendship and favour, and may promise ourselves, as the effect of it, *that he who hath began this good work in us, will carry it on, 'till it shall be perfected in the Day of Christ*.



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## S E R M O N VII.

The Certainty of the Miracles of Christ.

JOHN iii. 2.

*Rabbi, we know that thou art a Teacher come from God; for no Man can do these Miracles which thou doest, except God be with him.*

**I**N some preceding discourses on these words, I have shewn the *possibility* of *miracles*, and the *excellent nature* of the *miracles* wrought by *Christ* and his *Apostles*. I have also made such observations on the *character* of *Christ* and his *Apostles*, and the *End* for which their miracles were wrought, as prove these to have been facts in their nature *credible* and *worthy of God* to effect; and I now proceed

V. To consider the *evidence itself* which we have for the *certainty* of those miraculous facts which are ascribed to our blessed Lord and his Apostles, and which are the foundation of our faith in the Christian religion, as a revelation from God. Miracles may be in themselves *possible*, the miracles ascribed to the great author, and original preachers of Christianity, may be such in their nature as are liable to

*no reasonable exception.* The *characters* of those who are said to do them, may be confessedly good, and the *end* for which they are said to be wrought may be very great and important; and yet all this will be no sufficient foundation for our belief, unless there be *authentick evidence* to demonstrate their reality, and convince us of the truth of them.

If miracles have ever been wrought, they are as facts as *capable* of being *known* and *proved* as any other facts whatsoever, and the *same* eyes and ears that are sufficient to convince men of the truth of what they see and hear in any ordinary occurrence of life, are *sufficient* to convince them of the truth of these. If I see a man cured by the ordinary prescriptions of medicine of any dangerous distemper, 'tis impossible I should doubt of the reality of it; and if I see him instantly cured without medicine, only by the command of another, and see all the same effects and proofs of the cure in this as well as in the other case; my eyes and ears are as good judges in the one instance as the other, and 'tis impossible I can doubt of the reality of it. But in cures said to be miraculous, the senses may be deceived, and there may be an imposition and fraud. Allow it. But there can be no imposition or fraud, if I see a man paralytick, or a cripple, or blind from his birth, and knew him to have been so, and yet see him in an instant, and by a mere word made whole, walking and leaping before me, and having the full and perfect use of his eyes, and giving

all the same indisputable proofs that he sees, which all other men do who have never been blind ; I can't be more certain that any man is well and sound, and sees, than I can that these persons are, who are miraculously made so, and 'tis impossible I can have any good reason to dispute or question the *one* kind of cure more than the *other*, because the *proof* in both is absolutely the *same*.

If there may be as absolute a certainty of *miraculous* facts, as of any *others*, they are as capable of being *related*, by those who did them, or were witnesses to them, and the history of them is as capable of being written for the information of others, and transmitted to posterity ; and considering them merely as facts, to which the relaters were eye and ear witnesses, and in which 'twas as impossible that they could be deceived, as in any others of which they had the same proofs and evidences ; the history is *equally credible* in itself in one instance as the other ; because the *credibility* of an historian, as such, only depends on the competency of the *knowledge* of the facts he describes, and his *integrity* in relating them. In all cases where these are equal, the relation of the historian is equally credible ; and the facts being ordinary or extraordinary makes no difference in the case ; provided they are equally possible, and a competent cause and reason can be assigned for them. *History* relates of *Hippocrates*, that he *cured* many nations of the pestilence, and his skill in physick renders this account extremely credible,

credible, though the circumstances relating to these cures are no where particularly described, and few authentick vouchers for them are now to be produced. *History* also relates, that *Jesus Christ* did many *miraculous cures*, without the help of ordinary medicines, and some cures, for which human art and wisdom have never been able to find out any proper remedies. The *vouchers* for these are *many*, and have all the necessary *qualifications* to render them authentick witnesses, the history that relates them hath all the *internal* and *external proofs* of *credibility*, and the *power* to which they are ascribed is *equal* to the operations said to be performed by it. And therefore the history of these extraordinary cures, thus circumstanced, is in itself *as worthy of credit*, and hath just the same circumstances of probability and truth, as the other history that relates cures done according to the ordinary course of nature.

'Tis true, that miraculous facts are not easily to be admitted, nor the history of them to be hastily credited by those to whom they are related; but the reason is not *merely* because they are *extraordinary* or *miraculous*; because these, as possible in themselves, and related by competent witnesses are, as *facts*, as *credible* as any others that can be mentioned, and require no other grounds of credibility, can be proved by no other kind of evidence, nor the memory of them transmitted to posterity any other way than the most ordinary transactions of life whatsoever. But still, as



in all miraculous facts, there is a concurrence of many *peculiar* circumstances, that do not take place in any others, as the *consequences* that attend the admission of them are very *interesting*, as the *power* to which they are ascribed is *extraordinary*, or rather exerted in an uncommon manner, and the *end* for which 'tis at any time thus exerted must be proportionally *important*; so these and other like considerations, together with the *moral character* of the witnesses and relaters, must be regarded and attended to, previous to our belief of such extraordinary facts, and the mind must have full satisfaction as to all these particulars, in order to give a rational assent and credit to them.

An historian, or voucher of facts, who asserts things *impossible* to be done, or things in their circumstances highly *improbable*; or who relates things possible, but *miraculous*, without assigning any substantial reasons for them, or *end* to be answered by them, or an end *irrational*, or *immoral*, forfeits all title to credibility; not because he would not have been a *competent* witness, had he *actually seen*, and *fully known* them; but because these circumstances prove, that whatever he may assert, he did *not see*, and had *no knowledge* of them, but was either *imposed on*, and deluded, or invented and forged them to *impose* on others and answer some particular ends of his own. For no man could ever see that done, which is impossible to be done, nor ever produce any kind of evidence sufficient

to persuade another, that he ever saw a miracle, however possible in itself, for which no good reason can be assigned, or for which he actually assigns a bad one. St. *Gregory the Great*, one of the *Popes* of *Rome*, tells us of a miracle performed by one *Libertinus*, a monk, who being sent to *Ravennaby* his abbot, upon some business relating to the monastery, met in his journey a woman, who was carrying the dead body of her son to the grave. As soon as she saw the monk, she laid hold of the bridle of his horse, and swore she would never let him stir, unless he raised her son to *life* again. The monk always carried in his bosom, wherever he went, the *shoe* of one *Honoratus*, that had been abbot of the same monastery, and the immediate predecessor of the abbot who then governed it. He immediately dismounts, pulls the *shoe* out of his bosom, falls upon his knees, and puts the shoe upon the breast of the lad. And immediately as the monk was praying, upon the application of the shoe, the boy's *soul returned* into his body, and he restored him alive and well to his mother. Such a miracle as this carries its own confutation, though very gravely related by the *Pope* as an unquestionable fact; not because the resurrection of a dead person is impossible, or because *Gregory* would not have deserved to be credited in the relation, could he have produced all the necessary evidence of the fact; but because the very *circumstances* of the relation, the ridiculous and rash oath of an impertinent woman,

the application of a monk's shoe, and the evident *design* of the narration to recommend the folly of a monastick life, demonstrate the whole story to be a *forgery*, and the invention of a *lying Friar*, to do honour to his order, and recommend his trade.

Nothing was more usual in *Gregory's* time, than to introduce miracles in confirmation of certain doctrines that had no foundation in the Christian religion to support them, and of certain superstitions which were a manifest corruption of the simplicity of the christian worship. A miracle was an easy way of proof, to supply the defect of every other kind, and was always easy to be had, and as easy to be imposed on the ignorant and credulous. One *Peter*, a *deacon* of this same *Pope Gregory*, seemed to have some doubt about *purgatory*, and asked the holy father if he was bound to believe it. The pope, not being able to prove it any other way, hath recourse to a miraculous vision in support of it, and tells *Peter*, that *Germanus*, Bishop of *Capua*, being advised to make use of certain hot baths for his health, saw *Paschasius* upon his going into them, standing and waiting in the heat of them. This *Paschasius* had been a *saint* himself, but unfortunately for him, in the dispute between *Symmachus* and *Laurentius* for the popedom, he took part with the latter, against the former. *Germanus* upon seeing him in that situation was astonished, and asked him what he, who was so great a man, did there? *Paschasius* tells him, that he was put into that place  
of

of punishment only for his sin in siding with *Laurentius* against *Symmachus*, and prays him that he would entreat the Lord for him, and that if upon *Germanus* his next coming he did not find him in the same situation, he might assure himself that his prayers for him were heard. Away goes *Germanus* to his prayers, and returning a few days after, found *Paschasius* was gone; so that, as the *Pope* infers, he was purged from his sin after death, because 'twas a sin not of malice but ignorance. He also proves the efficacy of the sacrifice of the *Host* to deliver persons out of purgatory, by their appearing to others, and desiring of them that they would offer it upon their account, and by the success attending such oblations. Were not all relations of this kind ridiculous, and too contemptible to be believed by any considerate person, yet the end designed to be answered by them, being to promote *superstition* and to establish doctrines repugnant to the doctrine of *Christ*, 'tis impossible any proof, or kind of testimony, can render these stories credible; because no proof can be so strong, that such doctrines are true, or such practices agreeable to Christian piety, as their contrariety to the principles of Christianity is a demonstration of their falshood and superstition. And therefore all supernatural proofs, pretended in favour of them, can be nothing else but pretence and imposture; and these visions can never be regarded as realities, nor looked on in any other view, than as the dreams and delusions of brain-sick *Enthusiasts*, or the



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*rogueries* of wicked and deceitful *Monks*. And  
 this was the opinion that many entertained of  
 them in *Gregory's* time\*, who himself tells  
 us; that miracles grew cheap and contemp-  
 tible by the frequency of them. Nor had  
*Gregory* himself any great opinion of them.  
 For in his comment on *Mark* 16, 17, he  
 asks: What, my Brethren, will not you be-  
 lieve, because you cannot do these signs? And  
 immediately adds; These were *necessary* in  
 the *beginning* of the church †. But now the  
 church doth daily in a *spiritual* manner, what  
 the Apostles did spiritually; by exorcising the  
 faithful with the imposition of hands, and  
 telling them the evil spirit was gone from  
 them, they cast out devils, and by making  
*worldly* men praise God, they caused them to  
 speak with *new* tongues; by causing them,  
 through their good exhortations, to put away  
*wickedness* out of their hearts, they *took up ser-*  
*pents*; by *bearing* bad persuasions, and *not re-*  
*garding* them, they *drank deadly poison* without  
 being hurt by it, and by strengthening the  
*irresolute* and weak, they *laid their hands upon*  
*the sick and cured them*. These signs you may  
 do, if you will, by the help of God. Be  
 not therefore, my brethren, fond of *those signs*  
 which the *reprobates* may do in common with  
 yourselves. For it seems in his time miracles  
 were done by the worst of men. *They are*  
*not*, says he, *all elect that do miracles, but they are*  
*done even by the reprobates themselves* †; a plain

\* *Quotidiana Dei miracula ex assiduitate viluerunt*, tom. 3. p. 85.

† *Ibid.* p. 92.—93.

† tom. 4. p. 379.

confession

confession that they were lying miracles, and pretended wonders, in which the power of God had no concern, and which therefore could have no claim to any kind of credit and regard.

But because *some* persons are to be found, who forfeit their credit, by asserting the truth of miraculous facts, which have all the essential marks of forgery, and who therefore can never be competent witnesses of the things they assert, it by no means follows, that *all* relations of miraculous facts are to be looked on as incredible, or the historians that report them to be treated only as enthusiasts and impostors because they report them. Undoubtedly it becomes men to be extremely careful who, and what they believe in affairs of this kind; but still if the miraculous works asserted be *possible* in their nature, and there lie *none* of the natural and obvious objections against the capacity and integrity of the witnesses who assert them, and the historians that report them, nor indeed any other objections but what arise from the miraculousness of the facts themselves; to reject their testimony merely for this reason, is absurd: Because if this be a good reason for rejecting it, all miraculous facts must be incredible, and the witnesses and historians that report them be ever unworthy of belief, even upon the supposition that such facts are real, and the witnesses and historians have the fullest certainty of the truth of them. But to assert this, is to assert that *real facts* are *incapable of being*

*being known*, and that witnesses and historians, who are *worthy of credit, deserve none*. 'Tis to weaken the faith of all history, and to give mankind in general the lie. For if two facts, one miraculous, the other ordinary, be both of them equally true, and were as certainly done the one as the other, and if the witnesses of both, and the historians that relate them, are equally credible upon account of their knowledge and veracity, the credibility of both the facts is equal, and the witnesses and historians having equal qualifications, deserve to be equally believed or rejected; and to disbelieve the one merely because miraculous, when it stands upon equal good evidence with the other, and was as certainly performed, is to destroy the foundation of all human testimony, and to introduce *scepticism* and doubt throughout all the affairs and transactions of human life. If then it can be made appear, that the *gospel history* hath all the genuine marks of *authenticity*, and the sacred books were *written by those* to whom they are ascribed; and if the *witnesses* to the miraculous facts recorded in them be upon all accounts every way *qualified*, so as in all other cases they would be allowed highly worthy of regard and credit; we have then all the evidence that can be desired that these miraculous facts were really performed, and I may safely add, that 'tis impossible they should not be genuine and true.

The *authentickness* of books, or their being written by the authors to whom they are ascribed

ascribed, and at those times to which they relate, depends either upon *internal* or *external* evidence. The internal is that which arises out of those writings themselves. And to convince you, that the *Gospel History* was written by the *Apostles* and *first Disciples* of Christ; and that as *eye* and *ear witnesses* of the conversation, doctrines, miracles, death and resurrection of their master, they deserve *intire credit*: Please to consider the following characters of truth, which are to be found in their writings and testimony.

There is a *great simplicity* in the testimony which the *Apostles* and *Companions of Jesus* give to the *doctrine, miracles, and resurrection* of their Lord. It is plain and honest, without any artful colourings or dissimulation. They represented things, as they believed them to be, without disguise. They relate facts without ornament, and in a style and language proper to persons of their education and way of life. There is not the least appearance of a design to dress up a plausible story; or by exciting the *wonder* to impose on the *credulity* of mankind. What they say of Jesus's character is nothing more than what all the people of the Jews knew, and this is said with great modesty, without any laboured encomiums on his excellence or merits, or painting in pompous language the miracles which he did. See particularly the history of the Acts c. 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 22, 24, 25.

When they charged his *Murderers* with the impiety and wickedness of killing him, it  
was



was in *plain* and *express* terms, fitted to impress their consciences, and awaken in them a conviction of their guilt: And with an *evident design* to bring them to *repentance* and *salvation*. And when they spake of his *resurrection*, *ascension* and advancement to be a *Prince* and a *Saviour*; we have *no* surrounding *legions* of *Angels*, *no* *lucid tracts* of *Ether*, *no* *peals* of *rattling thunder*, *no* *paintings* of *rhetorick* to aggrandize the scene: But an *arilefs* narration of facts, which ought not to have appeared strange to the Jewish nation; whose prophetic books had long since foretold them, and of which therefore they should have lived in constant expectation. And this *plain* account of things is intirely correspondent to the *character* they bore, as *witnesses* of *Christ*; which required them to *report* facts, not *adorn* them; and relate what they knew of him, without using any art to recommend it. They were to be *faithful witnesses*, not *panegyrist*s, and to testify what Christ was and did, how he died, and rose again and ascended, and what offices he sustained: What was necessary to secure his protection, and obtain an interest in his redemption, as Messiah and Saviour. And this is a manner suited, not to gratify the vanity, humour the curiosity, or excite the wonder of those who heard them; but for religious and moral purposes, with that simplicity and perspicuity, proper to convince and recover them from their impiety and wickedness, and reconcile them to the great design of that doctrine and religion,

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religion, which they published in his name,  
and by his authority.

Their *simplicity of speech* was farther *natural* to men of their *private* stations, the former *occupations* in which they had been engaged, and their *education*, which was known to have been *destitute* of the advantages of *learning*. Had we found in their speeches and letters transmitted to us, long and laboured periods, drest with elegance of language, and formed by the rules of art; this would have supplied strong grounds for suspicion, and proofs which would not have been easily refuted; that these speeches and writings were *not their own*, but composed by others after their time, and under the shelter of their name and authority, imposed upon the world; to give credit to the cause, and recommend it to men of taste and learning. But for such an objection, they have left not a shadow of reason. The eleven Apostles were *plain Fishermen* and *Publicans*; and the *high Priests and Council* when they stood before them *took notice; that they were unlearned and ignorant men*. The words signify *private* men † *idiotai*, without a learned education. And in all the speeches which are attributed to them, and in the answers they made when interrogated by their superiors, their appears nothing but what persons of common sense in any class of life might have said; provided they were *well acquainted* with the facts they related, and the subjects on which they discoursed; and *acted* he. ein from a *sense of duty*.

† Acts iv. 13.

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It was however truly *wonderful*, that persons of their rank and life, and who had nothing of art or literature to recommend them, should all of a sudden set up as *witnesses* to *Jesus*; whom the government and people had just *crucified*. Should thus combine to oppose the men of power and authority in the nation, should without acquaintance, letters or extraordinary natural endowments, form such a scheme in reference to *Jesus*, the usefulness and miracles of his life, the reasons of God's permitting his death, the certainty of his resurrection and ascension into Heaven, and the great purposes of his exaltation to the heavenly glory: And so unite these various parts of his character, as to form one *consistent* scheme, and every single article be a necessary link: And should render the whole *subservient* to the *worthiest ends*, the spreading true religion through the world, and effecting the reformation and Salvation of mankind. That they should open this scheme in consequence of an event, that seems to have been *unexpected* by them, the *descent of the holy spirit* upon them at the *feast of Pentecost*; and that in an *instant* without premeditation or possibility of having made any provision for it, should adopt it into their scheme, connect it as a principal part, and urge it as one great evidence and solid demonstration of the reality of Christ's ascension. And that upon all occasions, their *testimony* in relation to these things should be *uniform*, and their *answers*, when they were examined, should be *consistent* and *pertinent*, with-

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without any time for reflection, or the least  
hesitation or difficulty.

All this is indeed *easily accounted for* upon  
supposition of the *integrity* of their *testimony*,  
the *certainty* of the things which they relate,  
and their being under the conduct of Jesus  
Christ, and *having* all that *divine assistance*  
which he promised them: Suitable to the  
testimony they were to give, and necessary  
to their giving it with dignity and success.  
Upon the *contrary scheme*, that they were  
either *weak enthusiasts*, or designing *impostors*;  
all that they said and did appears to be intirely  
*out of character*. As therefore in their dis-  
courses and writings there is too much *plain*  
*good sense* to admit the supposition of a weak  
*enthusiasm*; and nothing at all of that *art* and  
*fraud* which are sure to betray the hand of  
*imposture*.

It should be added, that their *firmness*, *reso-*  
*lution* and constancy, with which they gave their  
testimony, yield another good proof of their  
*veracity*, that they *knew the truth* of what they  
asserted, and were *sure* that *God* would *support*  
and *prosper* them. Courage and firmness of  
mind may naturally be expected, where there  
is a good conscience and a worthy cause; espe-  
cially were persons are influenced by religious  
principles, and persuaded that they act by the  
authority and under the countenance of God.  
This will enable them to endure contradiction,  
to despise dangers, and be fearless amidst all  
the terrors of persecution and death. But what  
can *hypocrites* and *impostors* have to *support*  
them



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them under these hazards and fears? Their views are wholly mercenary, and aim at nothing but secular advantages; at power, wealth or pleasures, which can be enjoy'd only in this life. And here the *witnesses of Christ* are absolutely clear of all suspicion. They stood to their testimony, and without fearing the faces of the great, publicly avow'd their doctrine; and without regarding the consequences to themselves, went on to teach and to preach in the name of Jesus; contrary to the prohibitions, menaces and ill treatment of their most powerful adversaries.

It is a very great recommendation of the courage and firmness of Socrates, that when he was before his judges, and was offered his life, if he would no longer instruct the youth of Athens, in the manner for which he was prosecuted by his enemies: He boldly replied, "That as he was placed in that station, and called by God to teach them wisdom and morality; he would never desert his post: For it was better to please God, than men." What encomiums have been bestowed on this truly great man, for his resolution and integrity? And why is not the same justice done to the *Apostles of Christ*? What heroic magnanimity did they discover, when prohibited by the high priests and Jewish council to speak and teach in the name of Jesus, they replied, *Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you, rather than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

heard†. And when afterward convened before the Sanhedrim, and charged with acting in contradiction to their former commands; the Apostles resolutely answered them; *We ought to obey God rather than men.* And when after this they treated them with indignities, and renew'd their injunctions *not to speak any more in the name of Christ*; and loaded them with stripes for their disobedience to former orders; the Apostles *departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name* §. These were *sure proofs of integrity*, that they taught what they knew to be true, and firmly believ'd they were call'd upon by God publickly to declare it; and esteemed themselves highly honoured by him, in being appointed to this sacred service. And full as great proofs of resolution and integrity did Paul afterwards give, when call'd to be an Apostle and witness of Christ.

Should any advance a contrary supposition, that the Apostles bore witness to a *falsehood*, and to what *they knew to be false*; all this *firmness is unnatural*; and the courage and constancy they exerted is without one instance in history, equal or parallel with it. The pretence of *enthusiasm* in this case is absolutely unreasonable. This we acknowledge will produce obstancy, and may arm persons with courage to endure persecution; but then the *signs of enthusiasm* will manifest themselves, in the *absurdities* which are vented, in those in-

† Acts iv. 19.

§ xl. 2.

coherences of speech and action, and in the follies and contradictions which betray a disordered imagination. But nothing of this appears in the *Apostles*; their conduct was grave and manly, their doctrine and instructions consistent, and their behaviour suitable to their circumstances. Their testimony also was uniform, and did not contain any of those extravagant and impious conceits, which are vented by distemper'd enthusiasts; no, it center'd in one grand point; which if false their whole scheme fell to the ground: But which if true firmly supported all they built upon it, and gave full credit to the doctrines which they preach'd. This was a publick fact, the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. This fact they did not endeavour to prove by philosophical reasonings, but by the evidence of their own senses and experience; who had seen and convers'd with Jesus after his Resurrection; and by the testimony of those scriptures, which the Jews believed to be of divine authority, and which had foretold this great event; and by those gifts of languages and miracles to which the whole city of Jerusalem, and afterwards the numerous churches of Christians dispers'd through the world, were witnesses†; and which they declared were according to his promise given them by Christ, after his ascension into Heaven. Here enthusiasm had no place, all depended upon the testimony of their own senses and experience, and upon

† Rom. xv. 18.

1 Cor. xii. and xiv.

the truth of the appeal which they made to the senses and experience of numbers, enemies and friends.

It must further be allow'd, that the Apostles, in giving their testimony to the doctrine, miracles and resurrection of Christ, could have *no interested views*, no worldly advantages and honours, to animate their zeal, and inspire them with constancy. When their master was alive and conversant upon earth, and they believ'd him to be the expected *Messiah*, they hoped for great preferments from him\*; and as he had chosen them to be his companions, they counted upon distinguishing advancement in his kingdom. And though when they saw him crucified, they gave up their hopes from him as a *temporal Messiah*; yet so fond were they of their former prejudices, that just before he ascended, they ask'd him, *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?* But how greatly were their sentiments alter'd soon after? They preach no temporal monarchy but the resurrection and ascension of their master, and that he is constituted *Lord in Heaven*; and thus they gave up all hopes of temporal riches and preferments. They found immediately, that their testimony would meet with the most fierce and powerful opposition, and expose them to the severest persecutions; yet they chearfully maintained it, and even *rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake*. When by hu-

\* Luke xxii. 24.



mourning the prejudices of their nation, and asserting a temporal Saviour and salvation, they would have stood fair for power and riches, as several impostors did about that time.

To conclude, they were *regarded* by the *body of the people at Jerusalem*, and by great *numbers* throughout *Judea*, as persons of integrity. The *many Myriads*\* whom they converted upon the spot to the christian faith are a full proof of this; and even many of the priests, and of the other persecutors of Christ, whom they brought to repentance and faith in a crucified, risen, and ascended Saviour†. Let me *sum up* the *internal evidence* in the words of a *very learned, judicious and impartial writer* ‡. “ The history of the New Testament hath, in an eminent degree, all the *internal* marks and characters of credibility. The writers appear honest and impartial. They seem to have set down very fairly the exceptions and reflections of enemies, and to have recorded without reserve, the weaknesses, mistakes, or even greater faults, which they themselves, or any of their own number, engaged in the same design with them, were guilty of. There is between the four *Evangelists*, an *harmony* hitherto unparalleled between so many persons, who have all writ of the same times or events. The lesser differences, or seeming contradictions, which are to be found in them, only demonstrate, they did not write with concert,

\* Acts xx. 21.

† Note, Dr. Chandler's M. S. ending here, the Editor was obliged to supply what follows, to *the Words, How much doth it become us, &c.* p. 230. for completing the Argument.

‡ Dr. Lardner.

The other parts of the *New Testament* concur with them in the same facts and principles. These are things obvious to all who read the books of the *New Testament* with attention. And the more they are read, the more conspicuous will the tokens of credibility appear †."

The *writers* of the *gospel-history* appear also to have been *eye and ear witnesses* of the principal facts and conversations recorded by them; or to have received their accounts *immediately* from those who were. They were therefore capable of *knowing certainly* the truth, in regard to the facts and conversations of which they wrote. And that they would *honestly* relate the truth, we are assured beyond rational doubt, by their giving up every secular interest, and even their lives, for the sake of their testimony. Especially when to this we add, that the *facts* related by them were of such a kind and so circumstanced, as *could not* have been *imposed* on the belief of mankind, had they not been real; nor have *produced* such *changes* in the state of the moral world, as from the histories of those times, we are assured they did.

The *external* evidence arises out of the testimonies of *cotemporary writers*, or of writers who lived *next* to those times, affirming that the books of the *New Testament* were *really written* by the persons whose names they bear; and were received and acknowledged

† See Lardner's *Credib. &c.* vol. I. *Introduct.* See also Macknight's *Harm. Prelim. Observ.* 7.

as theirs, by *numbers*, who were *best qualified* to know whether these were their *genuine writings*, and *nearly interested* in the *truth* of what they relate. And, *finally*, the evidence becomes compleat, when the *accounts* given of persons and things by the sacred writers are found to *agree* with those transmitted to us by *other* writers of character, who lived in or near these times; and that the main facts, if not related by them, are not contradicted or confuted by any, but have many of them by their *notoriety* extorted even the *attestation* of *enemies*.

All this evidence both *internal* and *external* we have for the truth of the *gospel-history*, and in particular for the certainty of the *miracles*, which attest the divine mission of our *Lord*, and of his *Apostles*. To engage in a distinct and full representation of this evidence, would lead me into a long *detail* of *citations* from ancient authors, and into many *critical disquisitions*; which would be thought not so proper for this place. I shall therefore content myself for the present, with referring those, who are desirous of full satisfaction in this most important affair, to the excellent work of the *Author* I just quoted, Dr. *Lardner*, the *credibility of the gospel-history*: And conclude this subject with putting you in mind,

How much it doth become every one of us, *seriously* to *consider* the nature and importance of the *Apostle's testimony*, and the truth and evidence which support it, to *receive* it with a *firm faith*, and *improve* it to the sacred purposes

poses which it is fitted to promote. In the great events relating to Jesus Christ, we are all nearly interested. And an habitual indifference to these, or contempt of them, can never be consistent with prudence and integrity. If *Jesus* was the *holy one of God*, as his history represents him; how neatly are we concerned to *put on his spirit*, to *tread in his steps*, and to make his life the pattern of our own. If the putting him to death was an act of so great injustice and impiety, what reason have we to *adore the wisdom and mercy of God*, who over-ruled this enormous crime, and made it a means of restoring the world, by accepting his son's *voluntary sacrifice* of his life, as the *propitiation for the sins of the world*.

And if, as the reward of his sufferings and obedience unto death, God has exalted him to be *King, Saviour and Judge* of the world, and given him *power to give eternal life*; with what *intire submission* should we yield to his authority, with what *willingness* put ourselves under his protection and government, with what *cheerfulness* make our approaches to God, confiding in his all-powerful mediation, *that we may obtain mercy, and grace to help us in time of need*? And how warm should be our concern, and how constant our ambition, *whether living or dying, to be accepted of the Lord*.

There is so much benevolence and goodness in the christian scheme, as would naturally prejudice us in its favour, and make us wish it true. It is so well calculated to ad-



vance the moral perfection of human nature, that whoever seriously embraces it, can never be destitute of the genuine disposition for happiness, or want any thing necessary to recommend him to the divine acceptance and approbation. And if we exercise that *repentance towards God* to which he calls us, and *live* by that *faith* in Christ, which is the governing principle of christianity ; it is impossible we can finally miss, what every thoughtful person most ardently wishes, the everlasting salvation of our souls.



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## S E R M O N VIII.

The Certainty of the Resurrection of Christ.

ACTS II. 32.

*This JESUS hath GOD raised up, whereof  
we are all Witnesses.*

THE great importance and value of truth is its usefulness to promote the practical purposes of true religion and virtue ; and it is an argument of the divine original and excellent nature of the gospel doctrine, that it is in the whole of it a doctrine according to godliness, and calculated to promote our improvement in holiness of life, and our disposition for final happiness, in the acceptance and favour of God. The resurrection of our blessed Saviour from the dead, is one of the peculiar and essential articles of the christian religion, and declared to be of such importance ; as that unless it be true, our faith is absolutely in vain \*, and that if we confess with our mouths, and believe in our hearts, that God raised him from

\* 1 Cor. xv. 14.

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*the dead, we shall be saved* †. And St. Paul assures us, that he counted all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus ‡, and especially that he might know him and the power of his resurrection. And yet it would be a difficulty to assign any reason, why the knowledge of this fact should be esteemed of such importance, as to be preferred to all other things, and have salvation connected with it; considering it, as a mere fact, intended only to raise our wonder, and void of all influence to secure any moral ends and purposes. Nor is it easy to conceive how God, who is a being of infinite rectitude and wisdom, should make the belief of any merely speculative truth or fact, necessary to his acceptance; or promise to give salvation and eternal life to the reception of it; if it had no tendency to promote piety and virtue: because it would be connecting his favour and acceptance with, and making our happiness depend on something of little worth and value in itself, and that had no influence to increase in us a disposition for happiness, and to render it in him an act of wisdom to bestow it.

But as this doctrine of Christ's resurrection is frequently inculcated in the gospel revelation, and declared to be an essential article of our faith; so we shall find, that it is not a curious speculative principle, but of a practical nature, and not only intended to surprize and astonish us, as an instance of the great and

† Rom. x. 9.      ‡ Phil. iii. 10.

wonderful power of God, but applicable and conducive to the most excellent purposes, and capable of being improved to the exciting the worthiest affections in our hearts, and to our establishment, comfort and peace in our christian profession and practice. And as I have frequently at this season offer'd to you the proofs that confirm this great and important fact, what I now principally intend is, to represent to you the *improvements* it becomes us to make of this interesting subject of the resurrection of Christ Jesus, as they are offered to our consideration by the inspired writers: Only first observing that our text consists of two parts, viz.

I. *The fact itself*:—" *This Jesus hath God raised up;*" and

II. *The confirmation of it*:—" *Whereof we are all witnesses.*"

I. *The fact itself*:—" *This Jesus hath God raised up.*" It should be observed, that these words were spoken before the *multitude* of the *Jews*, collected together, as the historian observes, *out of every nation under Heaven*, viz. where the *Jews* resided, and were part of the first Sermon ever preached in defence, and for the propagation of Christianity. It was preached in *Jerusalem* itself, and at the feast of *Pentecost*, when the *Jews* from all countries met at *Jerusalem*, and within *two months* after the crucifixion of Christ in that city, when the fact was *fresh* in every one's memory, and the Jewish rulers, priests and people, could have given a full account of that transaction,  
and



and justified their sentence and execution, if their proceedings in it had been *fair* and *equitable*. And yet notwithstanding all these circumstances, so unfavourable to carry on an imposture, which might have been immediately confronted and discovered by the most publick, solemn and authentic testimony and evidence; the *Apostles* without fear, or suspicion that what they declared could be in the least contradicted, *publickly* and before the whole body of the people, *affirm*: that *Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God among them, by miracles and signs and wonders, which God did by him in the midst of them*, and that they themselves *knew it to be so*. That nevertheless according to God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge they took him, and by wicked hands crucified and slew him: Thus arraigning the justice of the nation, declaring the innocence, the excellent and miraculous works of the person they crucified, and reproaching them for the impiety and wickedness of this murder.

Would any nation or government thus suffer itself to be *insulted*, and a publick execution condemned by a few private persons, as an instance of injustice and cruelty; if they could have vindicated the fact, and made the equity of it appear to publick conviction and satisfaction; and if the character of *Jesus* had not been beyond all possible exception, and the *miracles* he wrought *notorious* to the whole nation? Would the *Apostles*, if they had the least remains of prudence or modesty, have made

made this solemn appeal to the people in Jerusalem itself, that *they knew him* to be a man of God, and approved of him by those extraordinary miracles which he wrought in his name? Had they in this asserted a falsehood, all to whom they appealed, must have been filled with indignation, and have united to convict them of so known and impudent a lie: But sure of their cause, the Apostles insist on the innocency of Jesus, and the wickedness and guilt of their nation; and in vindication of his character go on farther to assert, that though *they crucified him, yet God raised him up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it; their own prophecies* having declared that God would not leave his soul in Hell, or his life in Hades, not Hell, nor suffer his holy one to see corruption." Circumstances these, that made it the more necessary for them to give some publick, authentick account of his trial, of the crimes laid to his charge—of the proofs that fixed them on him,—and of the reasons that vindicated his condemnation and execution, if they could have done it,—because the declaring his innocency and resurrection was a publick declaration, that he was the promised *Messiah*; as the Apostle immediately after my text adds:—" *This Jesus hath God raised, therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the holy spirit, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus,*

*Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."* The belief of these things could not possibly have prevailed, had there been any publick *authentick* proof, that he was a *real* malefactor, who justly suffered for his crimes; or could the miracles, which he was said to have wrought, have been *proved* to be the little tricks and frauds of an impostor, or had the doctrines he taught been shewn to be contrary to religion, lucrative or false.

And as they had the proofs of these things in their power, if there was any proof or truth in them, their *not* vindicating themselves is a nobler *vindication* of our Saviour's character and miracles: And their taking no publick measures to prevent the belief of his resurrection, nor giving any reasons why they counted it an imposture, evidently demonstrates, that they had no good one, and that they were *afraid*, if they misrepresented the case, of being publicly convicted of falshood and injustice. The *testimonies* of the *Apostles* at *such a season* and in *such circumstances* to the wickedness of his crucifixion, and to his being raised from the dead by the power of God, remove every possible ground of suspicion of their want of integrity, or their intention to impose on the credulity of mankind by a false account, because had they been conscious that they were propagating an imposture, they took the method that impostors never do, of being detected immediately in the fraud, becoming the objects of the publick contempt, indignation and abhorrence,  
and

and of preventing the cheat from possibly succeeding. This will further appear, if we consider,

II. The evidence to which they appealed for the truth of this fact, of the *resurrection of Christ, whereof we are all witnesses.*

It must be remarked, that the Apostles appealed to the sacred writings, as containing express prophecies, that *Christ should suffer and die, and rise again from the dead*, so that these great events were to take place in the *Messiah*, and were principal characteristicks, by which he was to be distinguished from all other persons whatsoever. Thus before my text, the 16th Psalm is cited, as predicting both these circumstances. “*My flesh shall rest in hope, because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, rather Hades, nor suffer thy holy one to see corruption.*” That Christ died, the whole nation fully knew; for they clamoured him to his crucifixion; and that he arose again the Apostles publicly affirm they were all witnesses, to whom he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs; being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God\*. So that in witnessing to his resurrection, they testified only to a fact, of which they were eye and ear witnesses; and of which they had such repeated proofs and full conviction, as that they could not possibly be deceived. But had the Apostles been disposed to support and propagate a fraud, and main-

\* Acts i. 3.



tain the resurrection of their master, though they knew the pretence of it was false; the nation and government of the Jews might have brought the matter to a short issue, and have *confronted* the testimony of the Apostles, by an evidence which would have been unexceptionable in its nature, and such as would have carried its weight, with all impartial and considerate men. For as they knew that he had declared, when alive, that *after three days he would rise again*, so to prevent all possible deception, the Chief Priests and Pharisees acquaint *Pilate* with this prediction, and, to secure themselves and their nation from all imposition, demand, that to prevent his *disciples from coming by night and stealing him away, and saying to the people he was risen, the sepulchre might be made sure, until the third day*: And this was a caution that well became them, considering the share they had in his death. Accordingly *Pilate* gave them a guard, and bid them *make the sepulchre as sure as they could, which they did by sealing the stone and setting a watch*. Now this was in its nature the strongest security against any deception. And had all the Apostles combined either fraudulently or violently to take away the body, it would have been impossible they could either way have prevailed against a guard of armed soldiers; and yet the body of Christ was gone on the third day, in spite of this precaution. The Apostles declare, *he was risen*, and that there was *an earthquake, that an Angel of God rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre,*  
and

and that for fear of him the keepers shook and became as dead men, and at length came into the city, and shewed unto the Chief Priests the whole of this awful transaction. If these things were not so, how comes it to pass that we have no authentick account to prove the falshood of this pretended miracle of an earthquake, the astonishment of the soldiers, and the extraordinary relation they made to the Chief Priests. This the Jewish government *could* have done in the most authentick manner, if all this was *fiction*; as they had the *power* in their hands, and wanted neither *zeal* nor *malice* to discredit the character of Jesus, and prevent the belief of his resurrection. And they *owed* it to the *nation* and to *themselves* to have done it, if they could have done it with any appearance of truth, as now their own fears were actually come to pass. Had they given any *consistent* account how the seal was broken, who rolled away the stone, what the soldiers did to prevent it, and how all this came to pass in spite of the guard that was placed to watch the sepulchre; this would have been rational and satisfactory, and the most effectual confutation of the pretence of his being risen: Whereas the method they took to *bribe* the soldiers that guarded him, and cause them to spread a report that was an absolute *contradiction* to itself, that his disciples came by night and stole him away, whilst they were asleep, was a poor contemptible expedient, that demonstrated them at a loss how to act; and that they were resolved to impose upon themselves, and if they

could, upon the whole world, rather than yield to the evidence of the fact they were ashamed and afraid to confess : And therefore as the *Apostles gave witness* to the truth of his resurrection *without* any opposition and contradiction, or contrary account, that carried any shew of probability and truth with it, from those who were in every interest concerned to prove it an imposture, if they could ; their united evidence to the fact is the strongest proof that can be desired of the authenticity and certainty of it : Especially considering

What the Apostle adds before the Jewish Sanhedrim and High Priest \*, that not only *they themselves were witnesses that God had raised up Jesus, whom the Jews slew and hanged on a tree, but that the Holy Ghost was a farther witness, whom God hath given to them that obey him* : Referring to the extraordinary and miraculous gifts of it, poured out on the Apostles at the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection. Gifts so extraordinary in their nature, as that there could be no *illusion* in the pretence to them, nor could these be bestowed by any other power but that of God ; the instantaneous knowledge of, and ability to speak in, so many different languages, without the least previous acquaintance with them, being impossible upon any other supposition but that of an immediate divine inspiration ; an inspiration that demonstrates the men that had it to be the messengers of

\* Acts v. 32, 32.

God, and that the testimony they gave to the resurrection of Jesus had the seal and confirmation of his unerring and infallible spirit. Since there cannot be a greater absurdity than to suppose, that *God should give* to a set of deceivers, endeavouring to impose upon the world, by false assertions of the resurrection of one who was justly condemned and executed as a malefactor, the instantaneous knowledge of so many languages, to qualify them to spread the imposture at once throughout almost all the known nations of the world, and thus necessitate mankind to believe a real fable and imposture—but thus much as to the fact.

I now proceed to consider of what *importance* this doctrine is to *religion* and *morals*, and the *practical inferences* to be drawn from it. And

1. The *resurrection of Christ* demonstrates the *truth of the prophecies* of the Old Testament, and the *fidelity* and *goodness of God* in the verification of them. Our Saviour both before and after his resurrection appealed to these predictions, and declared in the most positive and express manner, that in conformity to them, *Christ ought to have suffered, and to enter into his glory*: And there are the strongest prophecies to this purpose. The 16th Psalm will admit of no just interpretation, but the death and recovery from death of God's *holy one*. The 110th Psalm, plainly declares the *kingdom* and *priesthood* of one who was *David's Lord*, and who, previous to



his advancement, *was to drink of the brook of affliction, and then to lift up his head with triumph and glory.* The 53d of Isaiah expressly describes “his being *wounded, bruised and chastised, his being violently condemned and led as a lamb to the slaughter, and buried in his grave; and yet as seeing the travail of his soul, justifying many, and as dividing the spoil with the mighty; because he poured out his soul unto death, was numbered with transgressors, bare the sins of many, and made intercession for sin.*” Daniel \* also expressly assures us, that *the Messiah should be cut off, but not for himself, and that after this the people of the prince, that should come, should destroy the city and the sanctuary, and that the end thereof should be with a flood, and at the end of the war the determined desolation.*

These and the like prophecies, though delivered at very *different periods of time, and to different persons, who could have no connections and correspondences with each other, yet plainly declare the same truth of the sufferings and death, and future kingdom and glory of an illustrious person, called the Messiah, which, if from God, could not but have their proper accomplishment.* And as they were all fulfilled in *our Jesus, and in no one other person, that ever appeared with this sacred character, it points out to us the exactness and certainty of God's foreknowledge, that he clearly sees throughout the re-*

\* Dan. ix. 25, 26.

most periods of time, that he is acquainted with the actions of men, that he makes their design subservient to his own, over-rules their very vices to accomplish his own schemes of wisdom and mercy, and that though the performance of the antient promises and prophecies, delivered to holy men under divine inspiration, may be delayed for generations and ages, yet that *his counsels shall stand, and that he will do all his pleasure*, and that at the proper season, determined in the resolutions of his own mind, nothing shall fail of what he hath predicted, but be brought to pass in the minutest circumstances relating to them. Well may we say upon this review of the accomplishments of the prophecies, respecting the *Messiah*: "*He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working*; and assure ourselves, that whatever prophecies, as to the state of his church, the prosperity of his people, and the final destruction of his and their enemies, yet remain unfulfilled, shall not fall to the ground without being finally and compleatly *verified*. Again,

2. This *resurrection* of our blessed Lord and his consequent *advancement to glory*, are the noblest and fullest *vindication* of the integrity of his *character*, and of the truth of his pretensions, that he was *the Son of God*, the promised *Messiah*, the *Saviour of the world*, and of the truth and efficacy of his whole mediation. The shame, pain, and ignominy of his *death*, or his dying in so reproachful and cursed a manner, as it was in fact *to the Jews*

*a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness,* would have carried in it a very just and plausible exception, against his being the only beloved Son of God and the expected Saviour of the Jews; had not the providence of God removed this scandal, and by some very extraordinary interposition in his favour proclaimed his innocence, and the wickedness of his enemies, to the conviction of the whole world. And what could be a more effectual justification of him, than *annulling the sentence pronounced against him, and miraculously restoring him to life,* after his crucifixion and death. By this means *his own prophecies* concerning his resurrection were *fulfilled*; which were frequent and express, and proved that he was neither a weak *enthusiast*, nor bold and presumptuous *impostor*, in his repeated predictions of his own revival to life. By this his pretensions to be the *Son of God* were abundantly established; for as he took on him this sacred and divine character, so *he was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead* †, God establishing his claim by the power he exerted in restoring him to life. By this all the accusations of his enemies were most effectually confuted, God hereby proclaiming him *holy, harmless, and undefiled*. By this all the ancient prophecies, in their literal and full accomplishment, centered and were verified in him; and those seeming contradictions of his death,

† Rom. i. 4.

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perpetual life, victory, kingdom and glory were entirely reconciled, and appeared in him in the most perfect harmony and consistency. By this, though crucified and slain, he became capable of becoming *Lord and Christ*, of being a *Prince and a Saviour*, of blessing men by turning them from their iniquities, and of giving them repentance and the forgiveness of sins, of being exalted far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and of being head over all things to the church, his body, and of becoming our all powerful intercessor and our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

In a word, the perfection, dignity and efficacy of the whole gospel dispensation is by this great event abundantly secured, and the power, wisdom and equity of the divine conduct and administration set before us in the most convincing view; so that we may well say with the inspired Apostles, that *Christ* as dead and raised again, *is the power and wisdom of God*; and affords us therefore the surest reasons for the confirmation of our faith in him, and to support all our best and liveliest hopes of everlasting redemption by him. Especially considering further,

3. That this *resurrection of Christ* is an abundant demonstration, that his death was an acceptable sacrifice to God his Father, and regarded by him as a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. It is in this view he speaks of his own death \*. “ *I lay down my life for the*

\* John x. 15.



*Sheep*: And *my flesh*, says he §, *I will give for the life of the world*: And under this character it is continually represented in the sacred writings, as one great argument of God's love to the world; because he gave him to be the propitiation for the sins of it. And this representation of it is reasonable in itself, every way becoming the infinite perfection and rectitude of the divine nature, and extremely comfortable to the sinful children of men. By becoming man the Son of God came under all the sacred obligations of human nature, and like other men, owed the most intire and absolute subjection to his heavenly Father's authority and will. Obedience to him, and submission to the allotments of his providence, and to the trials of their fidelity and duty, whether more easy or difficult, are the primary laws of all men without exception. And the disposals of providence are various, the post of duty assigned to some being much more hard and severe, than that of others: And in these no one hath a right to direct God, or to say to him, *what dost thou*, or why hast thou ordered it thus. It pleased him to appoint to his own Son the most difficult proof of his fidelity, and the sharpest trials of his duty; undoubtedly as for other reasons, so for this, because he was fittest and ablest to bear them; and that by extraordinary humiliations and sufferings, he might become an illustrious example of patience, fortitude, and the most

perfect resignation to the will of God, unto the whole reasonable creation, and be rewarded with a dignity and glory, every way equal to his merit, and so might in all things have the pre-eminence.

To this purpose he became voluntarily a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, endured the contradiction of sinners, maintained the integrity and dignity of his character to the end, resolutely bare up under all the heavy load of grief that was laid upon him; and rather than renounce his post of duty, maintained it to the most certain hazard of life, and at last, when called to it, sealed his testimony to the truth he had delivered with his blood. What was it, that in all this dreadful scene was the spectacle, that God his Father beheld with pleasure? What, the pain and shame of his own Son on the cross, simply and in itself considered? Was he delighted with the cruel agonies he endured, and the dreadful tortures in which he expired, for their own sakes, and because he takes pleasure in the miseries of men, or requires and hath any satisfaction in human sacrifices? The thought is impious and absurd. No. He viewed the cruelty, injustice and perfidy of his enemies, who crucified his Son, with an indignation and abhorrence, that became his infinite compassion and goodness: And as the Jewish nation by this aggravated crime filled up the measure of their iniquity, he gave them to a destruction which no history can parallel; condemned them to be fugitives and exiles through

throughout all nations of the earth : A mark of the righteous displeasure and vengeance of God, that remains on their posterity even to this very day. What therefore rendered the death of Christ an *acceptable sacrifice* to God, what secured him the fullest approbation of his heavenly Father, when he gave himself to the death, was, that it proceeded from a principle of *filial* obedience to him, and *benevolence* to mankind. That it was *voluntary*, without repining and murmuring, attended with *firmness*, *patience*, and *unbroken resolution*, with *confidence* in his Father's goodness and firm assurance of his acceptance—that it was in *confirmation* of the *truth of God*—for the *support of religion* in the world—to be an *example* to all his followers, and, in a word, because attended with every circumstance of moral excellency and perfection, that could possibly recommend it to the greatest and best of beings.

It was this rendered the sacrifice of Christ's death of such intrinsic value in itself, and so highly precious and acceptable to God : And therefore God, according to the infinite goodness and perfect equity of his nature, considered this sacrifice of Christ in all the *superior merit* that accompanied it, as the *purchase* of the most exemplary *reward*, and as *deserving his advancement* to the right hand of glory and honour : And being constituted the great Mediator, Intercessor, Advocate and Redeemer of all, who should be prevailed on to believe in, and to obey him : And as this  
sacri-

sacrifice of himself to death was a *real purchase* of his reward, of being a *Prince and a Saviour*, it was for that reason a *true and proper sacrifice of propitiation for men*; because this very reward, which God conferred, *shewed him propitious*, and was an instance of the highest benevolence to mankind. As he *recompensed* his voluntary death with the *power to give repentance and the remission of sins*, to all humble and believing sinners, he declared himself by that death *reconciled to the world*, and that they should obtain *redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*: So that God by *raising Christ* hath declared his death to be a *real atonement*, as on the account of it he hath invested him with all the powers of redemption, and rendered it the great medium through which we obtain all the invaluable and eternal blessings contained in it. This places the death of Christ in the most important point of view in the gospel scheme, and evidently shews that it is at the foundation of all our hope; as it was the *price* of our Saviour's advancement to the mediatorial throne, and in consequence, of all the privileges for time and eternity, that we have received from him in virtue of that exaltation. Other important inferences I shall reserve for another discourse.



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## S E R M O N IX.

Important Consequences of Christ's Resurrection,

ACTS ii. 32.

*This JESUS hath GOD raised up, whereof  
we are all Witnesses.*

HAVING in the preceding discourse considered the *fact* of Christ's resurrection, and the *full assurance* we have of its reality from the *testimony of the Apostles*; and in part shewn the *importance* and *uses* of it, as by accomplishing the prophecies, relating to the Messiah, demonstrating the fidelity and goodness of God; as a full vindication of Jesus's character and pretensions, and a *proof* that his *death* was an *acceptable sacrifice* to God and *propitiation* for the *sins of the world*—I shall now make some other *important inferences*; and,

4. The *resurrection of Christ* is further a *strong and full confirmation* of another great and important article of christianity, viz. the *appointment of our Lord Jesus Christ to be the universal judge of the world*. When Peter first  
opened

opened the door of the gospel to the *Gentiles*, by preaching it to *Cornelius*†, he tells him; that *God raised up Christ the third day*, and shewed him openly unto witnesses, which he had before chosen, even to the *Apostles*, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead; and that he commanded them to preach unto the people, and to testify that it was he who was ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and dead: And in his discourse to the polite *Athenians*, he testifies to them, that now God commanded all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead ||. Our blessed Saviour in the most express terms claimed this sacred and important power and prerogative before his death; declaring “ that the Father judgeth no man, i. e. in his own person and character; but that he hath committed all judgment to the Son, appointing him to raise the dead, and to execute judgment on them, when raised to life, and to assign them severally, if they have done good, to eternal life, and if they have done evil, to damnation.” An assertion, that would have argued the highest impiety and presumption, if it had been *falsely* made; and that implies in it the most exalted dignity and honour, that we can well conceive to be conferred upon any one. But the *sufferings* and *death* of Christ seem'd to *destroy* this pretension and claim; and it would have been absolutely

† Acts x. 40, 41, 42.

|| Acts xxx. 31.

incredible and impossible to have been made good, *had he continued under the power of death*; since one dead himself could never raise others, nor be capable of sitting in judgment over them: but his *resurrection from the dead* immediately silenced every objection to the *possibility* of the thing, and was such a peculiar testimony of his interest in, and dearness to God, as shewed, that he deserved the utmost credit, and that his claim of this divine honour, was worthy of all acceptation: Since it is never to be supposed, that God would ever appear to countenance and justify such a pretension, if it had *no foundation* but in the weakness, vanity, pride and presumption of him that made it. And that when by his death, God had in the course of his providence destroyed the very foundation of such a claim, and put it out of the power of mankind to be seduced and deceived by it; he should himself contribute to propagate the belief of it, and even necessitate mankind to admit it as an important truth, by miraculously raising him from the dead; so that by this fact the doctrine of a future judgment is abundantly confirmed, and the person also clearly pointed out, by whom the solemn transaction is to be carried on and completed.

5. *The resurrection of Christ shews the possibility of a general resurrection, is an assurance to the people of God of the certainty of their rising from the dead, is the glorious pattern, as well as the sure pledge of what kind their resurrection*

tion shall be. Thus the Apostle reasons in his Epistle to the *Corinthians* †, in which he tells them, that *Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that sleep*: And that as the first man was of the earth, earthy; so the second man was the Lord from Heaven, not of an earthly, but a heavenly original; and that as the earthy man was, such also are those that are earthy, of the same frail earthly materials with him from whom they are derived: So also as is the heavenly man, such are those also that are heavenly, the state of their bodies shall be of a heavenly form and constitution, like his. That as we have borne the image of the earthy, been subject to the infirmities of this frail, earthly body; so we shall also bear the image of the heavenly, be transformed and fashioned in our body like unto his glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself\*. When St. Paul preached the doctrine of the resurrection at *Athens*, some of the philosophers mocked and scoffed at it, as an absurd and impracticable thing §. *Agrippa* also, the Jewish King, seems to have been of the same mind, and that this occasioned that sudden address of St. Paul to him ||, “*Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?*” With a power less than divine the thing is confessedly impossible: But will not infinite and almighty power, the power of God, the original former of the body out of

† 1 Cor. xv. 20. &c. \* Phil. iii. 21. § Acts xvii. 32.  
|| Acts xxvi. 8.



the dust, extend thus far? Will true philosophy thus limit the power of the universal creator? Is the recollecting the materials of a dissolved body *too hard* for him, *who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out the heavens with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?* Sound reason and philosophy will never affirm this. And if the thing were *dubious* in itself, yet *one certain and evident instance* of it is a sufficient answer to all objections that can be alledged against it: Since facts are irresistible evidences of the truth and certainty of things! And therefore God was pleased to raise up our blessed Lord, and to give the most satisfying evidence of the certainty of it, to give us by a sensible demonstration the utmost satisfaction of the *possibility* of the thing, and to assure all who believe in him of the truth of that doctrine which he himself taught †. That *the hour should come, when the dead should hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear should live; and all should be raised up to receive the proper fruit of their actions, whether good or evil.* And as our blessed Lord rose to an *immortal* life, and his body was transformed by the power of his heavenly Father into a *very glorious state* and appearance, to fit him for that *heavenly world* where he now resides; so we know, *that when Christ, who is our life, shall*

† John v. 25.

*appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is, and he in our bodies transformed into the same image from glory to glory. When this mortal shall put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in compleat and eternal victory; so that by believing in God, who raised up Christ from the dead, and gave him glory, our faith and hope in him, that his power shall also revive and quicken us, are abundantly confirmed and established: And in the gratitude of our hearts we have reason to say, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away, that is reserved in heaven for us. Further.*

6. *This resurrection of our blessed Lord is a very powerful motive to imitate him, in purity of heart and universal holiness of conversation, and to walk before God in all newness of life. This is the improvement made of it by the Apostle †, who says that we are baptised into Christ's death, i. e. into the belief of Christ's dying for sin, and of the necessity of our dying to it: And therefore by this baptism into his death we are buried with him, viz. in the spiritual and moral sense, should look upon ourselves to be as intirely separated from all the corruptions and sins of life, as though we were actually buried with Christ. That*

† Rom. vi. 3. 4.

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*like as Christ was raised from the dead to a new and heavenly life by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life, live a divine and spiritual life in imitation of him, in order that we may be raised hereafter to partake with him in the heavenly glory. And indeed consider the resurrection and advancement of Christ with the reasons assigned for it in scripture, and it will carry the highest motive and encouragement to universal holiness of heart and life, and to an intire and absolute submission to the will of God. For who is the person spoken of in the prophecy, and to whom was it promised, that he should not see corruption? Why, the holy one of God. What was the reason of that peculiar affection that the Father bare to him? His always doing the things which were well-pleasing in his sight. Wherefore did God highly exalt him, and give him a name above every name in heaven and in earth? Because he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. So that it was his being the holy and the just one, his perfect submission to his Father's will, and his being continually employed in his Father's work, that intitled him to a glorious resurrection, and was the reason of the transcendent reward conferred on him; to teach us, that a blessed resurrection is the recompence of obedience to God and keeping his commandments, and that purity of heart and holiness of life are the indispensable conditions of obtaining it. And can we imagine that we shall have this blessedness*

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edness upon *easier* terms than the Son of God himself hath? Or that if we do not resemble him by sanctity of manners, and submission to the will of God, he will ever raise us to a participation of his heavenly glory? He himself hath expressly precluded every such vain hope by assuring us\*, that though *all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and live*; yet that when they came forth, they *only who have done good shall obtain the resurrection to eternal life*, and they who have done evil shall come forth to the resurrection of damnation,—a resurrection which, though just on the part of God, shall be dreadful to them, as it shall be to their shame and everlasting contempt. And therefore the remembrance of this great event of the resurrection of Christ should put us in mind of the obligations we are under to separate ourselves from the corruptions of the world, to subdue our sinful passions and habits, to forsake our former sins, to yield ourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead, to do the things that are acceptable to him, to live a spiritual and divine life; and as risen with Christ, to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, and to set our affections on things which are above, and not on things on the earth, that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also may appear with him in glory †.

\* John v. 29.

† Colos. i. 1, 4.



And indeed what reasonable hope can he have, whose affections are sensual, who *minds only earthly things*, and hath no relish for spiritual objects and employments? What ground can he have, in the nature of things, to expect a future resurrection to heavenly enjoyments? How can it be, that he whose life here is a perfect contradiction to the life which Christ led, when he was on earth, should ever imagine that Christ will raise him hereafter to a life of glory, honour and immortality? Or that if he be entirely destitute of *his image in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness*, he should be hereafter a partaker of *his image in glory*. Such an imagination hath no foundation in reason or in the gospel revelation; and can have nothing to support it, but the most criminal vanity and presumption. It is contrary to the whole gospel constitution, which makes the future resurrection the most dreadful consideration to impenitent, unbelieving sinners, as it shall be a resurrection to judgment and the most certain and aggravated condemnation; and which makes it a benefit and blessing to them only, who follow his example and learn to purify themselves as he is pure, according to the express assurance of the Apostle, *that when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is; and that every man who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, as he is pure* †.

† John iii. 2. 3.

7. This doctrine of *Christ's resurrection* affords the *noblest support* under the consideration of our *mortality* and in the nearest view and approach of *death*; as it is a full demonstration that death is not an unconquerable enemy, and that there *is a power* which *can* and *will* *redeem* all the faithful from the dominion of the grave. It had long prevailed over the minds of men, that there could be no salvation from the hand of death, nor any return to the light of God, after that by his stroke they were once separated from it. And indeed as they had no just notions of the attributes and providence of God, no revelation from him to enlighten them in this important article, nor ever any instance of a dead person's restoration to life among them; how was it possible they could have any just conception of such an event? Or what could induce them to entertain the comfortable hope of it? And yet they saw and were abundantly convinced, that death was a very substantial evil, and though they did not generally believe, that it was an intire extinction of their being, and were led to conclude that the state of good men in the invisible world was much preferable to the condition of the impious and wicked; yet they looked upon all that was to come, and even the best allotments in the invisible regions, as somewhat shadowy and unsubstantial, and far inferior to the happiness of the present life. And I think their conceptions natural, and such as reason itself would lead men to; and it is in

some measure confirmed by revelation, which invariably speaks of *death* as the *punishment of sin*, as introduced by *one man's offence*, and as suffered to *pass on all men* on this account, *because all are sinners*. And whatever may be the different allotments of providence to the good and evil; yet as death is a real punishment, and the standing monument of God's displeasure against sin; it must, in the most favourable sentiments we can pass on it, carry in it a very real and substantial disadvantage, and deprive men of many valuable blessings, which life renders them capable of enjoying. And as the heathen world had no prospect and hope of being ever delivered from it, 'tis no wonder they esteemed it the most formidable evil; and groaned and travailed in pain throughout all ages under the prospect and fear of it.

• But how *sure a remedy* doth the gospel-light and grace provide against this terror and distress? How doth the doctrine of *Christ's resurrection* as the *pledge* of theirs, who believe in him, disarm this formidable enemy of the horrors that surround him, blunt the point of his sting, and take away the deadly poison of it; so that it cannot mortally wound us. For a temporary death is not such an intolerable evil in itself, and in the view of revelation is a necessary preparative for the happiness of a future state. Immortality in the present world would be an *immortality of temptation and sin*, of *affliction, pain and punishment*; and thus perpetuate the shame and reproach, the misery

misery and curse of men. And therefore God in his infinite mercy hath wisely determined, that these bodies, which are the seats of distempered passions, and have the seeds of sin plentifully scattered through their whole constitution, shall be resolved to their original dust; that all those sensual and criminal dispositions, to which they subject us, may be entirely worn out, and they be raised again in a purer and more glorious state; that they may be a fit habitation for those souls which are renewed by the spirit of the living God, and thus capable of existing in the world of incorruptible glory.

This is the blessed assurance, that the resurrection of Christ gives us, which was a resurrection to immortal honour, and abundantly proves, that it is not *impossible* for God to raise the dead, and that it is absolutely *certain* he will do it; since he raised up our Lord, that our faith and hope might be in him, *that he will also quicken our mortal bodies by his spirit, which dwelleth in us.* And therefore as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, Christ also himself took part of the same, that through death, by dying and rising from the dead, he might destroy him who had the power of death, even the Devil; and thus deliver them, who through fear of death would otherwise have too much reason to be all their life time subject to bondage †. And in this view of things, what reason can the sincere christian have to

† Heb. ii. 14, 15.



cherish a moment's uneasiness at the thought of dying? Keep but thy passions under government; abstain from those sins *which war against the soul*; awake to righteousness and sin not; cultivate and improve the dispositions of piety; keep thy lamp well trimmed, and supply it well with oil for burning; let the graces of God's spirit be in constant exercise, and the virtues of the Christian life be habitually practised, and all is safe. Death cannot hurt thee; his dominion over thee shall be comparatively short: *Because Christ lives, thou shalt live also.* He conquered death by reviving to an endless life; and as the Father has given him to have life in him, i. e. to raise from the dead whomsoever he pleases, he will watch over thy sleeping dust: He will revive and comfort thee in the mansions of the grave, and in the morning of the resurrection quicken thy dissolved frame, restore thee to the creation and works of God, and, what is more, not only *show thee the path of life*, but introduce thee into his Father's presence, where there is *fulness of joy and pleasures which last for ever more.* A prospect so sure and pleasing, as may well cause thee to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

8. As this doctrine affords us this grateful relief under the consideration of our own subjection to death, and the necessity of our lying under the corruption of the grave; so it gives us great consolation in reference to the state of our departed friends who are gone before us, and lived and died in the faith of Christ.

Christ. For they are *not dead*, as that word implies an *eternal separation* from the body. They only *sleep in Jesus* : Their dissolution shall last but for a comparatively short season : And God will hereafter restore them to life, and to the enjoyment of the most satisfying and permanent happiness.

This is the improvement which the Apostle makes in his Epistle to the Thessalonians \*, *I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others who have no hope : For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him ; so shall they be ever with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.* And can any nobler arguments of comfort possibly be suggested to our minds, under the loss of our dearest friends, than what this consideration conveys to us ? They are only asleep—taking the refreshment of a grateful slumber after the perils, afflictions, temptations and trials of life.—*And they sleep in Jesus*, united to him by faith, similitude of temper, and a conformity to his life : And they sleep under his protection and care, and whilst their slumber closes their *bodily* eyes, his presence *enlivens* their *separate state*, and in their minds they have a sure expectation of his appearance for their final redemption ; an expectation which shall not fail them. For *we believe that Jesus died and rose again*, that he

\* 1 Epistle iv. 13, &c.

triumphed over death himself, and hath sovereign power to rescue his prisoners from the dominion of the grave; and have therefore full assurance, that *all those, who thus sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him.* And that when *the Lord shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Arch-Angel, and with the trump of God, the dead in Christ shall rise first,* shall all of them, awake to glory, honour and immortality, and so shall we be ever with the Lord, share the honour of being allowed to reside where he is, and never more be separated from his presence. Well therefore may we say, *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; for they rest from their labours, and their works shall follow them.* God will abundantly reward their *works of faith and labour of love,* and at the appointed season give them the full proof of their *adoption, in the compleat redemption of their bodies.* And is it not one of the most pleasing imaginations, that can possess our minds, of meeting them hereafter in the world of righteousness and immortality, where death shall make no farther separation between us? Our bodily disorders shall create no more mutual distresses, nor any of these irregularities of temper, to which we are here all too liable, lessen the satisfaction of our mutual converse, or for a single moment interrupt it?

Who upon this view of things would *live here always?* Or with so ill to their most valuable friends, as to desire that they should, or to recall them from that *rest of the people*  
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of God, in which they are reserved to the glorious morning of the future resurrection? Now they *rest* securely under the shadow of the Redeemer, where *there shall be no more curse, nor sorrow, nor pain*, no more danger of the final forfeiture of their happiness, or fear of being excluded from the benefit of the gospel redemption. So that on their account all our grief is needless and unreasonable. They are the truly happy persons who have got *safe* into their *haven*; and *we* the proper *objects of compassion*, who have more risks to run, are left to sail with uncertain winds, and to beat on at a distance from the port of safety and happiness. But the thought of a *risen Saviour*, who is *mighty and able to save*, is a relief and comfort under all the perils and uncertainties of life. The sea we traverse may have its storms; but he can calm them, and speak them into peace. We may be sometimes uncertain where to direct our course; but if that heavenly Pilot steer our bark, we shall not wander wide of the place we aim at. Dangers may encompass us; but his power can protect us. Enemies may distress us; but through him that strengthens us we shall become superior to them. The risen and exalted Jesus is a compassionate and *merciful High Priest*, *able to save to the uttermost*, and by office and inclination ready to succour us in every time of need. Whatever therefore are our burthens and afflictions of life, whatever our cares, anxieties and sorrows, let us not sink under them, nor always pore  
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on the uncomfortable side of our prospects. Better things await us. The scene here, however uncomfortable, shall soon pass away. Death, which is the *curse* of *bad* men, shall be *thy blessing*, christian: And what is the commencement of their misery, shall be to thee the beginning of endless peace and happiness. Remember that *Jesus*, though crucified and slain, *lives at the Right Hand of God* to plead and sustain thy cause—that he possesses the mansions of glory as thy forerunner—that he lives in Heaven as thy Redeemer—that he will appear a second time to thy compleat redemption—that he will cause thee to shake off the fetters of thy mortality, and when he recalls thee to life, perpetuate the gift of it, and intirely deliver thee from every circumstance that can render thee the least unhappy in the possession of it. Go therefore and remember with grateful adoration and praise, the almighty power which raised him from the dead: Improve this great and wonderful event to the strengthening thy best resolutions for God and goodness, to the increase of every right disposition and affection in thy own breast, and to thy abounding in all the fruits of unfeigned godliness; and rest assured, that he, *who loved thee and gave himself for thee, will shew thee the path of life*, and receive thee finally to himself, that thou mayest *be where he is to behold his glory, Amen.*

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## S E R M O N X.

The principal Objection to the Resurrection  
of Christ answered.

ACTS X. 40, 41.

*Him GOD raised up the third day and shewed  
him openly; not to all the people, but unto  
witnesses chosen before of GOD; even to us, who  
did eat and drink with him after he rose from  
the dead.*

THERE is scarce any design whatsoever,  
that can be named, be it ever so ex-  
cellent and good, nor any means that can be  
made use of, though adapted in the wisest  
manner to accomplish such design, which are  
not liable to the censure of proud and insolent  
men, and against which it is not possible to  
find out plausible objections; if persons will  
indulge the cavilling spirit, or set themselves  
up for the supreme judges in all cases and cir-  
cumstances whatsoever. Even the ways and  
works of God himself, though none by searching  
can find them out to perfection, nor understand  
the reasons and schemes of things, as they lie in  
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the divine mind, have not escaped this *censure*. It is reported by credible historians, that *Alphonfus*, one of the Kings of *Castille*, greatly blamed the disposition of the frame of nature, and blasphemously said: 'He could have advised the creator better to have adjusted the frame of nature, had he been present at the creation of the world.' Nor have there been wanting those, who have given themselves the name of *philosophers*, who, because the world was not made in every respect just agreeable to their imaginations, *denied* the very *Being* of God; and because that all events in the world were not managed according to their notions of wisdom and goodness, have concluded, that there is no *divine Providence* over-ruling and directing all things for wise and benevolent purposes. However it is evident, that all conclusions of this kind are rashness and folly, for this reason, if there was no other, because it is impossible that men can be competent judges of things whereof they have no exact and comprehensive knowledge; and because the schemes of creation and providence are so vastly extensive and complex, as that it is as impossible that men should fully comprehend them in their minds, as that they should hold the waters of the sea in the hollow of their hand, or weigh the dust of the earth in a ballance. And therefore, whatever censures they pass on the works either of creation or providence, must be presumptuous and irrational; because they censure what they know not,

not, and draw conclusions from the most uncertain and mistaken premises.

The same way of false reasoning and wrong method of false judgment are too often practised by the opposers of divine *revelation*. The scheme of *redemption* as little pleases them, as this of *creation* and *providence* has pleased others; and because there is, as they imagine, something wrong in this or the other part of it, they reject the whole; and will not believe any part of it to be of a divine original, because this and the other particular hath not been managed as they think it ought to have been, and as they themselves could have better ordered and directed it.

Our blessed Saviour, when he was on earth, chose *twelve persons* to be his almost constant companions, in order to be *witnesses* to the *sanctity* of his life, to the *miracles* he wrought, and to the *instructions* he gave in the great concerns of religion and virtue; and one would think that this was the only possible method by which a faithful account of these things could be transmitted to future ages. And as his *resurrection* from the dead was one of those *miraculous* events that was intended, among many other reasons, to be one *principal evidence* of his divine mission, and of the divine original and authority of the doctrine and religion he taught, so he chose to make these *twelve persons* the *witnesses* to his resurrection, that they might be capable both of teaching his religion, and of giving this substantial evidence, that he who taught it

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was demonstrated to be *the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead*. And this was necessary, because *his doctrine* would have wanted one of the strongest confirmations, had they not been witnesses to *this fact*, and because the publishing this fact of the resurrection of Christ to the world would have been of *no consequence* to mankind, had they been *strangers* to his *doctrine*, and could they not have informed the world as well of his *religion*, as of that miraculous resurrection which was designed to confirm it.

But as they were constituted witnesses of both, they were therefore every way fit for the office to which they were appointed, *viz.* to publish his Doctrine and Gospel, with proper authority to the world; and no persons could, in the nature of the thing, be fit for the execution of such an office, but persons in their or the like circumstances; as, I think, must appear to any one who will consider this affair with due candor and impartiality. And accordingly *Peter* tells *Cornelius*, that God anointed *Jesus of Nazareth* with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the Devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. And that God raised him up the third day, and shewed him openly; not indeed to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God; even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose again from the dead. And  
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the testimony of such witnesses, who had such evidence of the thing they testified, would be of very great weight in almost any other supposeable case that could be mentioned.

But this account did not satisfy some of the *antient* enemies of Christianity, and is objected against by some of the *modern*.

*Celsus*\*, an *Epicurean philosopher*, who lived near the first publication of Christianity, in a treatise he wrote purposely against it, says, "If Christ would have in reality his divine power appear, he ought to have shewn himself to his *enemies*, to his *judge*, and absolutely to *all the people*." And *Origen*, who answered *Celsus*, thinks Christ's *not appearing* thus publicly is an *objection* not to be made light of or despised; and indeed what *Origen* hath said in answer to it is very far from removing the difficulty. The same objection is urged by the *philosophers* of the *present age*†, who ask, "Why should the credit of this fact depend on the testimony of the *Apostles* alone; that if they had been *enemies*, and converted by the miraculous resurrection of Christ, this would have been much better; and that he ought to have appeared, especially to the *magistrates*. And that the *Jews* not owning him as the Messiah, was owing to his *not appearing* to them after his resurrection."

It will not therefore be amiss at this season of the year, and especially, as the present pre-

\* *Orig. cont. Cels. lib. 2. § 63. p. 434.*

† *Resur. of Jes.*

*confid. p. 75. &c.*

vailing disposition of the times is not over-favourable to the cause of Christianity, seriously to enter into this argument, and remove, if we can, an objection that hath been thought, both by the friends and enemies of the Christian Religion, of some consequence, especially as the removal of any considerable difficulty will add a proportionable strength to the Christian cause, and render the foundation of it more firm and immovable.

I would only observe, as previous to what I have to say on this argument, that there doth not seem to be any thing *peculiar* in the circumstances of the *Jewish* people, that renders it necessary they should have a *more extraordinary* method of conviction in this article of Christ's resurrection, than all other nations of the earth; as they had crucified him in spite of all his former miracles, and don't appear to have had any peculiar integrity of disposition to recommend them to such a distinguishing favour from God. And therefore this equity evidently appears in this disposal of providence, that as Christ was equally intended to be a *common blessing* both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*, so God saw it proper, that they should both have exactly the *same evidence* of the truth of this extraordinary event, that was to be the foundation article of the Christian faith. So that the *Jews* had no prerogative above the *Gentiles*, and the *Gentiles* could not complain that they wanted any proof which the *Jews* had, or were under any disadvantages as to the grounds of their believing in Christ, from which the

*Jews*

*Jews* were exempted. And if the *testimony* of the *Apostles* was, all things considered, the very *best* method that could be taken to render *Christ's* resurrection *credible* and *certain*; the complaining for want of other evidence will appear highly unreasonable. But not to insist on this; let us observe,

1. That the *objection* itself, or rather the supposition, that he ought to have appeared after his resurrection to *all the people*, is a very vague and *indeterminate* one, and admits of a very great variety of questions, which must be settled before the sense of it can be well understood, or a proper and explicit answer can be given to it: As particularly,

Doth *all the people* mean every individual of the *Jewish* people, or only the inhabitants of *Jerusalem*; or only of *Jerusalem* and the neighbouring towns; or of the inhabitants of *all Judea*, or the *Jews* inhabiting in all the nations of the then world, or those only who had a hand immediately in *crucifying him*. If this supposition be good, that he ought to have appeared to *all the people*, why should any be omitted? why the inhabitants of *Jerusalem* and in *Judea* be so very much favoured above those who dwelt in other cities and countries; especially, what claim had his *crucifiers* who condemned him by false accusations and witnesses, and who *Pilate* himself knew had delivered him out of envy, what claim had they to such extraordinary tenderness, as that they should have a more peculiar method of conviction of *Christ's* resurrection than all the



rest of the whole nation? If indeed he ought to have appeared to *all*, I think there should be *no exception* ‡: For could not *all* when they had seen him *speake truth*, and speak what they saw, as well as *some*; is truth ever the worse for being attested by *numerous* persons, by a *whole* nation as well as a *part* of it, or is that *faith most true*, which hath the *least evidence* for it, or is the testimony of a whole nation of so little account, as that it should be slighted, when it can be fairly had?

If then Christ, according to this reasoning, should have appeared to *all the people* in general without exception, the next questions that arise are, *How* he must have appeared to have satisfied the whole body of the nation? *where* he could have found them collected? what place would have been proper to have gathered them together? how they must have had the *summons* and notice to have assembled? and *how long time* would have been necessary for their receiving this conviction? Had the *Apostles* gone about to have *given them notice*, very few would have believed them, or thought it worth their while to have met at the appointed place of rendezvous, only to have seen a man that the Apostles said was risen from the dead. The *priests* and *rulers* either did not believe it, or not like the thing; and so would *not summon* them by publick authority. Besides, the *time* necessary for such a collection of the whole body from all parts and nations would have

‡ Resur. of Jes. confid p. 79.

been so long that *many*, and probably many of his *crucifiers* would have *died* before they could have met together, and so absolutely have lost this conviction, which would have been unreasonable, and what, according to our supposition, they might reasonably have complained of. If it be said that this appearance to all might have been *gradual*, and Christ might have conversed with them time after time, 'till the satisfaction and conviction had been general; I would then ask, *How long* a time they would have allotted for Christ's thus continuing on earth, that his appearance to the *Jews* might have been *general*; in *what circumstances* must he have appeared to them? If in the *same* condition of poverty in which he lived before his death, they would have *despised* him as much after his resurrection as before, and treated him with the same insolence and contempt. If with the proper marks of *external power, grandeur and riches*, this would have made the *Jews mad*, and excited them to *rebellion*; the *Romans* would have scarce permitted him to have appeared in *Jerusalem*, and gone about from city to city with numerous followers and outward splendor and magnificence. The *Romans* would have suspected a *revolt*, and the *Jews* would certainly have made one. Such an appearance besides was *contrary* to the declared *character* he assumed, of *meek and lowly in spirit*, it would have gratified the pride and vanity of the *Jews*, which he came to check; and confirmed them in that notion of a temporal

Messiah and Saviour, which had nothing but prejudice and false opinion to support it. But supposing all these circumstances well settled, yet,

2. Such a *general* appearance, had it been possible, might have been wholly *useless* and answered no manner of good end, and carried no kind of conviction with it that he was actually risen from the dead. The *Sadducees*, who absolutely denied, like our *modern philosophers*, the very *possibility* of a resurrection, would have laughed at such an appearance. They would either have denied him to be the *same* person that was crucified, and said his disciples had changed him, and made marks in his body, on purpose the better to carry on the imposture; or the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* might have *joined* with them, and taking up the objection that is even now held up to us; that he was *never really put to death*, but taken down from the cross whilst he was only in a *swoon*, came to himself again in his sepulchre, and was fraudulently conveyed from thence by his disciples. Or supposing they should have thought him *really dead* and *really risen*, I am not sure but that they, who were *wicked* enough to say, when he cured by his command a possessed person that was born blind and dumb, *This fellow cannot cast out devils but by Belzebul the prince of devils\**, would have been weak and wicked enough to have said, *This fellow was not raised but by the power of the*

\* Mat. xii. 24.

*prince of devils*; for they might have said it with equal decency, candor, reason and appearance of truth. And farther,

This general appearance to all must have been wholly *needless* on *another* account, and could have been no manner of confirmation to most of them of his real resurrection from the dead. For though, according to the supposition, *all* had seen him, how would this have convinced all that he was the *same person* who had been put to death, since by far the *greatest part* of them had *never seen him*, nor knew him before his crucifixion? How then could they be sure he had been dead, and was the *same* individual person returned to life? In this, *viz.* that he was the same person, they could have had no manner of satisfaction but from the *testimony of others*, and this, we are told, they *ought not to have believed*, and by consequence being themselves only *hear-say witnesses*, their testimony would have been of very little significance to have confirmed the fact, and strengthened the foundation of the faith in the world: And therefore his appearance could have been of no use but to those who had before personally known him, and as to these we find, that infidelity and personal malice would not have wanted suppositions to have evaded the evidence, and rendered his appearance ineffectual. But then

Had this been the case after such a public appearance before them, had they imputed it to the want of his having been thoroughly dead, or to his being restored to life



by the power of the devil, are we sure they would not have publicly *insulted him* again, and demanded of the *Roman* governor the full execution of his former sentence, and clamoured him to a *second crucifixion*? Or if they could not have prevailed with *Pilate* to have consented to this, would they not have acted by *Christ*, as they did with *Lazarus*, when they consulted after his resurrection to put him to death, because the people had flocked together to see *Jesus*, and *Lazarus* whom he had raised †? Had they entertained any suspicions of the sentence's not having been thoroughly executed, or were they under the possession of an incurable hatred to his person, this must have been the consequence of his publick appearance to them. And though this would have been extremely grateful to such a set of men as the Scribes and Pharisees, and Priests and Sadducees of those times, and, as far as appears, to many in our own days; yet God was pleased to judge otherwise, and to deliver him from all the farther insults and cruelties of that wicked and profligate generation.

It should be also considered, that had this been the consequence of such a publick appearance, it would not only have been an *high injury* to his person, but a *very great prejudice* to his religion and doctrine, and probably have entirely prevented the belief and progress of it in the world. For had his resurrection been

† John xii. 9.

real, his being *insulted* and despised, and treated as an *impostor* after it by the *Jewish* governors and people, would have been such a *publick* protest against it, as would have greatly destroyed the credit of it, and given the highest reason to have suspected the truth; and had he been put to death the *second* time, the whole scheme of Christianity would have been destroyed, which depended on his resurrection, unless God had *raised him a second time*. Had this been pretended or a real fact, *how* could it have been *believed*; if fraud or imposture had been suspected in the *first* resurrection, it would have much more been suspected, and wholly prevented the credibility of the *second*; and if a *publick* appearance was necessary to the belief of the *first*, it would have been as necessary to the belief of the *second*, and the same series of events might have been acted over again a second time, and I doubt not but the enemies of Christianity would have found out *objections* enough against a *second* resurrection. They would have said, the miracles of the first would have been sufficient; why should God raise him once and not give *proper evidence* of that; why did he not *prevent* his second crucifixion; to what purpose the *expence* of a *second* miracle, when the first would have been sufficient? A resurrection once, they would have then said, might have had some probability, but that God should raise him only to be put to death again immediately, and thus double the miracle by a second resurrection, is absolutely incredible, because

because neither his second death nor resurrection could answer any end, which might not as well have been provided for by the first; and indeed such a pretence would have been an unanswerable objection, had Christianity been founded upon it.

So that could all the circumstances of the number he should appear to, the manner of his doing it, the length of time necessary to make his proper appearance in, could these and the like circumstances, I say, be fully settled, so as to be free from all material just objection; yet such appearance might have been of no manner of service for the conviction of the Jews themselves, that his resurrection from the dead was real. It would not have convinced the *Sadducees*, who all in a body denied the *possibility* of the thing, and therefore, though real, must have counted it an imposture. Nor might it have convinced the *other part* of the nation who believed a resurrection *possible*, that *Jesus* was *actually* risen; because it might have entered into their heads that he was never *wholly dead*, by which they would have accounted for his appearance after his crucifixion, without believing any thing of his resurrection; and therefore such an appearance to all the people might have carried no conviction to them. It might certainly have had as little effect to convince *after ages* of his resurrection, and our *modern unbelievers* would certainly have been as little satisfied of the truth of it as they are now. For some of them are *professed Sadducees*, who even in  
writing

writing declare \*, “ That for a dead person to rise to life again is contrary to the uniform and settled course of nature, and that the laws of nature inform us, that it is *impossible* for a dead body to live again.” Others question the *reality* of Christ’s *death*, and they pretend to account for his appearance after his crucifixion, because in truth, as they say, he was never dead. And though his resurrection had been *real*, and his appearance to the people *universal*, yet if through a sadducaical scepticism on the one hand, or a denial through prejudice and hatred of him on the other, the *Jews* in a body had *rejected* the account of his resurrection as an imposture and fable, the enemies of christianity would have triumphed in this as an invincible argument against the truth of it, and would have denied that such a publick appearance was satisfactory to themselves, because unsatisfactory to those to whom it was immediately made ; And by consequence the pretence that such a publick appearance to the people was necessary to convince them of the fact, is an irrational and absurd supposition ; because that can never be necessary to convince of the truth of any fact, which possibly might have carried in it no conviction at all, especially if there were other *more likely* methods of conviction that might be, and actually were made use of for this purpose. Nor is this supposition, that they would not have been convinced of his

\* Anf. to the Trial. p. 91.



resurrection even by a publick appearance to the people, at all improbable. For the *Saducees*, upon their principles of the impossibility of a resurrection, precluded themselves from all possible conviction in the case, and would have said in modern stile, "What no man's senses ever discerned was never the object of any man's sense; and that in cases of this nature we should have reason to question the veracity of our eye-sight or the object, and that one action pretended to be done contrary to the laws of nature, contradicts all her steady uniform springs and movements." And as our modern unbelievers are sometimes disposed to question the truth of his death, to account for his appearance after his resurrection, why might not the Jews formerly have had the same disposition to answer the same purpose? For I imagine they had *enmity* enough to Christ to lead them into any suspicions prejudicial to his character, and an equal share of *sagacity* and *invention* with any that can be named in the present generation. If therefore we can but suppose, what, methinks, it requires no extraordinary measure of faith to do, that *God knew the disposition of the Jews*, and foresaw that this and the like consequences would have flowed from such a publick appearance of Christ after his resurrection to all the people; and that it would in the issue have been so far from adding any weight to the actual belief of Christ's resurrection, or promoting that belief in the world, as that it would have really been an objection

objection against it and hindrance to it; and that the method of choosing *special witnesses* to attest it, would prove a *more effectual* means of gaining credit to this important event; if we can but imagine that God foresaw these things, Christ's not publicly appearing to all the people will appear so far from being any real objection against the truth of his resurrection, that it will appear to be a wise and favourable orderance of his providence to render the belief of it more easy and general. I have shewn that such an appearance *might* have destroyed the credibility of the fact, how then can it be proved that it *would not* actually have done it? If God foresaw it would, his own wisdom and goodness would direct him to make choice of a different method; a different method was taken, that method actually proved *effectual*, that method therefore was a *fit* and *proper* one; and therefore to affirm that another method than that which is taken would have been better, is to affirm that of which it is absolutely impossible we can be competent judges, and to find fault with a method that we are sure by the consequences was effectual to answer the end intended.

I might rest this matter safely here; but that I may give this objection the fullest scope, I will suppose that such a publick appearance to the people had convinced them that he was actually *risen again from the dead*; and that as they knew him to be thoroughly crucified, and fixed dead on the cross by the spear that wounded  
him,

him, so they had incontestible evidence and the fullest satisfaction that he was restored miraculously to life again ; the consequence must have been, either that they would nevertheless have *rejected* him from being the *Messiah*, or that they would have *submitted* to him and *believed* in him under that character.

The *first* supposition is far from being *impossible* or *improbable*, viz. that notwithstanding their being convinced of his returning to life, they would *neither* have owned him as a *prophet* or their *Messiah*. For such was the *aversion* they had conceived towards him, and the *inveterate malice* that influenced them, because he was not such a *Messiah* as they had formed an imagination of, and because his doctrine and life were a perpetual reproach of their hypocrisy and wickedness, that probably, though they had believed his resurrection, they would not have believed it to have been *effected* by *God*, but might have been hardened enough to say, as they did when by his mere command he cured a possessed person who was both blind and dumb \*, *This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Belzebub the prince of devils*; so they might have said on the occasion of the resurrection, *This fellow was not raised but by the power of the prince of Devils*, for they had equal reason to ascribe his miraculous works when living, and his resurrection after death, to the effective influence of the same power. There could not well be a

\* Mat. xii. 24.

stronger evidence of his divine mission and authority than his *raising Lazarus* and others from the dead, facts they could not possibly deny; but did these facts convince them, did a whole life of miracles persuade them to submit themselves to him? Nothing less. What could his own personal resurrection have done more? they had all the reasons that corrupt and worldly men could have, all their prejudices, passions, views and interests to prevent the possibility of their conviction, and rather than grant him to be the *Christ of God*, would have had recourse to *magick*, or any other the most improbable causes, to have accounted for his resurrection. Now supposing that he had personally appeared before *Caiaphas* and the *priests* and *rulers* of the people who had condemned him, and that they were convinced all of them that it was the *same Jesus* whom they had crucified, would *Caiaphas* †, who without enquiring whether he was guilty or innocent was for condemning him, would he have altered his political prudence, would he have concerned himself how he rose, or by what power, would he or his assessors in judgment have stooped to a man as their Messiah, Prince and Lord, whom but a little before they had insulted and vilified, and clamoured to the cross, and traduced as a subverter of the people, a *blasphemer*, and enemy to *Cæsar*? Would their pride and malice have borne his reproaching them with

† John xi. 40, 41.



his murder, his exhorting them to repentance, and threatening them with the judgments of God, if they did not repent?

Bad men ever had and ever will have recourse to any kind of methods, though ever so criminal, to prevent their conviction in any thing that is against their pleasures or worldly interest. The same original reasons of their hatred to him would have subsisted, after this appearance to them as before, viz. his disclaiming all earthly power, and the nature of his doctrine quite opposite to their principles and practices; and therefore they must have still continued to have hated him, and their malice and fury would have been heightened, as it frequently happens among extremely wicked men, by the very means that should bring them to a better mind, by this his recovery from the dead, or by any methods providence could have made use of to reclaim them. Had therefore our blessed Lord appeared before *Caiaphas*, the priests and rulers of the Jews, whilst they were under such a disposition, would they not have gnashed their teeth at him, as they did on *Stephen*, reviled him as an impostor, rejected him with contempt, and, if they could, have acted over again the whole scene of his sufferings and death? Of what signification therefore to them would this publick appearance have been, how was it necessary for their conviction, when possibly they might not have been convinced at all by it? How was it a better method than his appearing to twelve  
proper

*proper witnesses*, when it might have been, as to them, of just the same efficacy with that which is just of *no efficacy* at all? It is evident that such an appearance, with these consequences, must have had a very bad effect on after ages; for had the *priests* and *Jewish people* rejected him after such an appearance to them, it would have given room for suspecting the truth of his resurrection, and persons would have been apt to argue, that there must have been some very strong reasons for his own nation's rejecting him, and indeed have too much cause to have questioned the truth of the whole history of his death, resurrection and appearance after it *to all the people*.

But let us suppose farther, that such a publick appearance *had effectually convinced them*, that he was a *prophet* of God and their *Messiah*, whom they generally expected about that time; what must have been the natural consequence of such an universal apprehension and conviction? This certainly, that they would immediately set him up for their *temporal king*; for the *Jews* had no other notion of their *Messiah* but that of their supreme prince and governor; and no expectation from him more strongly rooted in their minds than this, that he was to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, and render them an independent flourishing kingdom; and therefore had they universally owned him as *Messiah*, they must for that reason have publicly proclaimed him king, taken up arms under his conduct, instantly revolted from the

*Romans*, and renounced all farther allegiance to them, and the whole history of Christ demonstrates this was continually uppermost in their thoughts.

If our blessed Saviour had *not gratified* this national prejudice and pride, if he had endeavoured to reclaim them from their madness, and *publickly* declared that *his kingdom was not of this world*, that he would not lead them in their attempt to throw off the *Roman yoke*, and that God had sent him to redeem them from their vices, to restore *true religion and virtue* among them, and not to concern himself in any of their temporal affairs; what must have been the consequence, what would they not have resolved and practised in the madness of their desperation and disappointment? They would either in their rage have immediately changed their sentiments concerning him, and acted to him as the people did to *Paul at Lystra*, who first *thought him a God*, and then *stoned him* when they found themselves disappointed; or else they would have paid no regard to his remonstrances, *forced him to be a king*, and thus by their tumult and sedition have brought down *Pilate* with his forces on them, which might have proved the destruction both of Christ and them, and which ever of these things had happened, it must have been the ruin of his cause, religion and interest in the world.

But suppose *Christ had fallen in* with this popular prejudice, abetted the revolt of the *Jews* from the *Romans*, and set himself up at their head

head as their captain and leader; he must either in consequence have prospered in his attempt to deliver them from the Roman power, or at length have wholly failed in the enterprize.

Had the *latter* been the case, that he had wanted success, and that after a short or long struggle the *Romans* had *conquered*; here the objections against his being sent of God had been many and absolutely unanswerable. It would have demonstrated that his pretensions to be the *Messiah*, must have been all *imposture*; for had God promised such a *Messiah*, and Christ been the person, God was engaged, in order to vindicate his own fidelity; to secure him the victory; and therefore his failing in the attempt would have been the most effectual confutation of all his pretensions. The nations must have cursed him, as an impostor and seducer of the people, for the calamity and destruction he had brought on them. Had he died in the struggle, all would have judged him justly punished for his crimes, or had he been taken prisoner, the *Romans* would a *second* time have *crucified him* at *Jerusalem*, or sent him in chains to Rome as a spectacle of infamy, there to have died by the hands of the common executioner, and history would have recorded him as another *Theudas*, or *Judas of Galilee*, who drew away much people after them by their false pretences, and perished themselves and many of those who followed and obeyed them. But on the contrary,



Supposing he had *conquered*, driven the *Romans* out of *Judea*, restored the liberty of his nation, and rendered them the terror and scourge of all the nations around them; why undoubtedly the *Jews* would have been pleased, and he would have stood on record as a *brave* and *fortunate commander*, and many would have revered his name and memory for his successes and military abilities. But what would all this have been to the *interest* and *prevalence* of *true religion* and *virtue*, which too seldom prevail in camps, or flourish amidst the havocks of the sword, the siege of cities, or the transactions of a campaign; what tendency would all these things have had to reform the *Jews*, or to recover the nations from idolatry, or convince them that Christ was a reformer sent from God, or reconcile them to have embraced his religion. It may be said he might have spread religion as he conquered; but besides the great unlikelihood of this, the enemies of Christianity would have found an unanswerable argument against it, and they would have represented Christ as another *Mahomet*, exclaimed against the propagation of his religion by the *sword*, and have had too much reason to have said, that he took this method of spreading his religion, because he wanted others; and that the use of force and violence is an evident proof of the great defect of reason and argument. Had this been the case, as the objection itself would have been, at least, such as I could never have got over; so we should have entirely wanted the  
*strongest*

*Strongest proofs* of the divine original and excellent nature of the Christian religion, arising from the *nature* of its doctrines, precepts and promises, the *extraordinary* and *miraculous gifts* of the *spirit*, the *faith*, *patience* and *constancy* of its *confessors* and *martyrs*, and other things of a like kind, that exalt it above all other institutions which ever appeared in the world.

But to dismiss even these suppositions, let us imagine, that such a *publick appearance* of Christ as is contended for, had not only convinced the *people*, but *all their rulers* of the truth of Christ's resurrection, and his being in consequence the promised *Messiah*, and that out of their deference to his authority and power, they had neither *rebelled* against the *Romans*, nor set him up for their *temporal* governor and king, but quietly submitted to his ministration, and obeyed him in whatsoever he should have appointed them; I would then ask, How would this have established the belief of his resurrection among mankind *better* than what the *evidence* of the *Gospel writers*, and the *testimony* of the *twelve Apostles*, by their preaching, could have done?

For *how* must it have been *known*, that the *people* and *rulers of the Jews* did *see* him after his resurrection, or did *believe* him to be actually risen again after his death, what kind of evidence could we at this distance have had of this? Had the chief priests and people *employed Matthew* and the other *Evangelists* to insert these facts into their histories, the enemies of Christianity have shewn us the

way how to object against such an account as this. They would have said \*, "*Who was the author of these gospels? they are thought to be Matthew's and others, but it is not known! when were they written, or where; not that neither! upon what authority were they at first received and communicated to us? Upon the authority of the Church of Rome, that mother of lies and abominations; are you infallibly sure the gospels were written by those themselves whose names they bear, and if so, that nothing is now in their gospels but what they wrote, that these gospels were written without error at first, and that nothing hath crept into them since, and that no absurdity or contradiction can be proved out of the Evangelists writings compared together? " No, they would say, this is to be believed but not proved, and the contrary may be shewn." They might farther say, *How do we know, that the priests and people employed these Apostles to insert this account of their seeing Christ after his resurrection, and of their believing the certainty of his resurrection, into the gospel they wrote? We have only the Evangelists word for it, but no authentic proof that they had the order they pretend to. And yet it could never possibly be known, if the thing had been true, that Christ did publicly appear to his crucifiers and the Jewish nation after his death and resurrection, but by such an historical evidence; and this kind of evidence we see, is in the**

\* *Ans. to Trial, p. 82.*

judgment of the great masters of reason, liable to a *thousand objections*, and not at all worthy of being credited and believed. So that we are still as far as ever from the conviction we want. And if this publick appearance of Christ after his resurrection to the people, which is insisted on as necessary to the belief of his resurrection, must itself ever remain an *uncertainty* through the nature of that *historical evidence* by which alone it can be proved, the resurrection itself must be equally uncertain with the evidence that is to support it, and we should unquestionably have been told, that we bring one uncertainty to prove another, and therefore absolutely fail in our proof. Besides,

Had the *chief priests* and *people of the Jews* been known to have believed his resurrection, supposing this the most unquestionable fact, that they were persuaded of the truth of it, what satisfaction would this have been to *other nations*, what weight and conviction would it have had at *Rome* or *Athens*, or in other parts of the world, where the *credit* of the *Jews* ran extremely *low*, and by whom they were accounted a superstitious, mean and execrable people? If the *Jews* said *they saw him* after his death and resurrection, by far the greatest part of mankind could *not* have said it. Had *Jesus* gone himself a progress through the world after his resurrection, what proof would even that have been of the truth of his *resurrection*, to those who *never saw* him nor *knew* him *before his death*, and therefore could not



possibly tell whether he was the individual person that died and revived and lived again? That must have depended wholly on *his testimony* and that of *his companions*; which, without some very substantial proof, the world at that time was not in a disposition easily to admit, much less would the testimony of the Jews, could it have been obtained, have produced the general acknowledgment and belief of mankind, nor would any one have thought himself obliged to have credited such a resurrection, merely because the *Jews* affirmed it.

Supposing the *Jews* as a body, the *High Priest*, their *Sanhedrim* and all the *Heads, Elders, and Governors* of the people, had made a solemn, publick and *authentick act*, declaring they had through prejudice crucified *Jesus Christ*, but that they were fully satisfied both of his innocence and divine mission, because that he was *risen* again from the dead, and they had *seen him* since his resurrection to their full conviction; I say had they given this testimony in the most authentick manner they could, what must have been the *effect* of it in the then generation, and in other nations, and after ages? Why the authentick individual act could have *reached* to but very few places, and probably would have been *reposed* safely in *Jerusalem* itself; and had the *copies* from it been ever so numerous, it would have left room for *doubt*, and not have carried the same weight with the *original*, and in process of time, by frequency of transcribing, might have undergone great *alteration*, been  
at

at best but a second hand evidence, and in time, by the variations of it, might have proved no evidence at all.

Or if we suppose the *original* record could have been *universally seen*, or the *transcripts* ever preserved *genuine* without material alteration, there would have been two enquiries in which the world would have expected to have been satisfied; and these are, whether the *Jews* had *full* and *sufficient* information themselves of the fact thus attested, and whether their *integrity* and *honesty* were to be trusted; as to the first, had their integrity been *unquestionable*, their *care* in examining into the fact would have been liable to great *doubt*. Sensible men would have asked, Did those who signed the record *see him dead*? Did they *watch* him in his *grave*? Did they *see him rise*? Were they *sure* that the real dead person was *not taken away*, and another substituted in his room? With other questions of the like nature that would not have been very easy to be satisfactorily answered. The *Jews* were looked on as a *credulous* nation, that loved miracles, and boasted of many in their history; and this of the resurrection of Jesus would have been looked on in the same light of delusion, had there been nothing else but their affirmation in favour of it.

But I am apt to think, that whatever opinion the world might have entertained of their exactness and care in examining into the fact, they would have a *worse opinion* of their *integrity* and *honesty*: For the *Jews* in general had no great reputation in the world on this account.

account. Many of the *Gentiles* thought the resurrection of the dead an *impossibility*; all these must have necessarily looked on the whole account of Christ's resurrection as a forgery: *Others* without troubling themselves about the possibility or impossibility of it, would have looked on it as a *contrivance* of the *Jewish government* to raise the sinking credit of their nation, or an invention to gain proselytes to their religion, and a new-forged miracle in order to supply the place of the old ones, which were almost grown out of reputation, and which the world esteemed as nothing better than the contrivances of the first formers and princes of their nation, the better to reduce the people into subjection and obedience. And farther,

Had they made such a *publick act* in favour of Christ's resurrection, *how* must it have been *published* to the world, and made known for the general benefit of mankind? Would they have sent *ambassadors* all over the earth, with a commission from the priests and rulers, to have notified it to the kingdoms of the world? They never thus published the miracles and religion of *Moses* and the *Prophets*. Few would have been found willing to have undertaken such a hazardous and laborious embassy, the expences of it would have been too heavy to have been borne, and their reception, in all probability, would have soon made them tired of the service, and speedily sent them back to those who employed them. Or would they have employed persons in a more *private way*,  
who

who must have paid them? how must they have been maintained? how many would have been sufficient to have published it? what authority would they have been vested with? how could they have proved that they were not cheats? how could they have convinced others that what they called their record was not a forgery? what man of sense would have given them any credit, or treated them otherwise than with scorn and contempt? A thousand difficulties attend this scheme that demonstrate the vanity and folly of it.

Much less could such a publick act have gained credit in *after ages*. Our *modern unbelievers* would immediately have urged, the *improbability* that the *Jews* should first crucify Christ as an impostor, and then by a national act declare him a messenger of God, and restored by a divine power to an immortal life. They would have called for the *original act*, but that would have been *lost*; the *copy* they would tell us is liable to great *alteration*, they would have stiled it a *pious fraud* of the christians, or declared the *mother of harlots* to be the *inventress* of it, charged it with interpolations, asked us how we came by it, who was *Caiaphas*, *Annas* and the rest who subscribed it, and made a thousand other objections to have evaded the force and destroyed the evidence of it. As there could in nature be *now* no other than *historical evidence* of it, they would have told us, that this is *uncertain*, and that this kind of evidence grows every day *less and less*, in proportion as it is at a farther



ther distance from the time when the thing was first transacted, and therefore must have rejected it as a mere story and fable.

But I will for once make the *largest* supposition that I can, *viz.* that if all the difficulties I have before mentioned could be fairly got over, that the fact of Christ's resurrection, as *testified* by the *priests* and *rulers* and *people* of the *Jews*, could in a very competent number of years have been *spread through the world*, and that upon this single circumstance of Christ's appearing to all the *people*, fully attested and solemnly confirmed, *Jews* and *Gentiles*, might, I know not how, have been brought to give credit to it. Yet even all this could of itself have been of *no great consequence to the world*, and would have been, without *other circumstances*, wholly *insufficient* to have *planted the Christian religion* among mankind. For supposing the fact had generally been believed, what good consequence would have followed from it, unless the *design* and *reason* of it was *fully understood*, unless the former life, the doctrine, precepts, promises and religion of Christ were known also, unless men were acquainted with the intentions and effects of his death, and the glorious consequence of his resurrection, his being appointed *Mediator* and *Lord* of men, and *universal judge* both of the living and of the dead. The resurrection of Christ was but one single part of the scheme of Christianity, it was intended as a confirmation of his divine mission, and to establish thereby the credit

dit and heavenly authority of his religion, and to engage men wholly to submit to him in the concerns of their eternal salvation, in order to obtain the benefit of eternal life. He rose from the dead as an assurance that all who believe in him should be partakers of a like resurrection, and that God by him would confer on them the blessedness of eternal glory. But what would the knowledge of his resurrection avail, if this thing were not also understood with it? what would the belief of it have signified without this information? It might for all that I know have procured him the honour of being thought a *new God* by some of the *Gentiles*, and procured him a few images in some of their private chapels and temples among the rest of their deities: But of what advantage would this have been to the *Christian religion*, how would it have tended to establish the *doctrines of his gospel*? A resurrection without some valuable connections is a doctrine of no consequence to the world, and it is impossible men could have divined what the Christian religion was, merely by being told of Christ's resurrection, unless they had his religion also particularly preached to them. Now the *Jewish priests and rulers* were *incapable of publishing this*, for they knew it not themselves, they were not his companions in life, they had never received any personal instructions from him, they had seen but few if any of his miracles, and therefore could not, in the nature of the thing, be employed in publishing what they had never  
been

been witnesses to; so that their publishing the fact of the resurrection would have been a thing of nothing, because they knew nothing of that religion of which the resurrection was intended as a solemn confirmation, and so could not publish his resurrection and his religion together.

How was this to be done? Why only by those who were *witnesses to both*, only by those who attended him throughout his whole ministration even to his death, and therefore by those of them principally whom he specially chose for this purpose, and to whom he gave the honourable names and titles of *Apostles*. So that we are under an absolute necessity to introduce for this purpose the *Apostles* as *Witnesses of Christ*, or some other of his *constant companions*; and those who assert that the appearance of Christ to the rulers and people was necessary to give credit to the fact of the resurrection, must allow, if they will consider the affair impartially; that the testimony of his Apostles, or some that were his constant attendants is as necessary, in order to make the testimony of the others to the truth of the resurrection of any consequence and benefit to mankind.

And if the testimony of the Apostles to the nature of his religion be *necessary*, and the *only testimony* that now can be given to it, because they only have left us an account what that religion is, their testimony is *sufficient* for this purpose also; because they testify of things to which they were immediately witnesses,  
and

and it is of *equal authority* with the testimony of the rulers and people, had they given theirs to the truth of Christ's resurrection.

And had our blessed Lord appeared thus publickly to the Jews after his resurrection, how must this have been *published to the world*, and *conveyed to posterity*, as the confirmation of Christ's doctrine and religion? It is evident that his religion could be published to the world only by *one* or *both* of these ways; by *writing an account* of it for the benefit of those who were disposed to read it, or by *preaching and instructing* those who attend on it. If the *former* only had been used, and there had been only a *few treatises* wrote on this subject, this could have been of but little consequence, as these writings could have fallen but into *few hands*, as printing was yet a secret to the world, whereby the progress of Christ's religion and doctrine must have been extremely slow, and the *generality* of people were *incapable* of perusing and understanding such writings, and being involved in business or pleasure, would think themselves little concerned in them; whereas the *progress* of Christ's religion was to be *quick and speedy*, like *lightening*, which reaches, as our Lord tells us, instantly from one quarter of the Heavens to the other.

Since then it was absolutely *necessary* that *proper persons* should be employed in *preaching* the resurrection and religion of Christ, would the enemies of Christianity think it right, that *two sets* of persons should be employed, *one*  
to



to affirm the resurrection, and that he appeared publicly to the people after it, and the other to teach his religion, in the principles and duties of it, without saying any thing of his resurrection? But this would be liable to a thousand difficulties, and would render both suspected of design and fraud. If some of those who preached Christianity could speak of his resurrection only, and knew nothing of his doctrine, and the others of them could speak only of his doctrine, but knew nothing of his resurrection; men would generally have judged that there was nothing in what either of them preached, and that if they could not both have said the same things, it was of no signification what either of them said: And thus the credibility of both must have been absolutely prevented, and neither the resurrection nor doctrine of Christ have gained any progress or belief in the world.

If it be said that *both* these things might have been entrusted with the *same persons*, and that it would have confirmed their evidence, could they have said that Christ appeared to the whole body of the nation after his death and resurrection; I answer, that this would have been no confirmation of their evidence, had the *Jews* publicly *disowned* him and ill-treated him after such an appearance: This would have been the strongest circumstance *against* the probability of the thing, and the credibility of their evidence. For the objection would have been obvious; there must have been a fraud, because though it is pre-

tended

tended he appeared publickly to the people, it is allowed that the people rejected and ill-treated him, which they would not, could not have done had they believed God raised him from the dead. And therefore they who affirm his *appearing* publickly to the people was a *necessary* circumstance to render his resurrection probable and credible, must first demonstrate that the people would have been convinced of the resurrection by such an appearance, and have submitted to him as their Messiah in consequence of it. But this is impossible, and therefore the circumstance they suppose *necessary*, his public appearance to the people *irrational*.

But supposing the *preachers* of Christianity could have said, that Christ appeared *publickly to the people*, and that his resurrection and divine authority were believed in consequence of it, might not they to whom they preached have asked them, Were *you witnesses* to the resurrection yourselves? If they could not have answered, they were, would not the reply have been natural, It will be time enough to believe you, when yourselves can affirm, you saw it; the people you tell us who saw it, are at a distance, and we cannot enquire into the circumstances of the fact from the witnesses themselves; you only tell us an *hear-say story*, you may speak truth, but you must excuse us from readily believing you. It is an answer every man of sense living would give in a like case, and not think himself obliged to believe any thing about it without some farther evidence.

But supposing they could have said, yes, *we ourselves actually saw him alive after his resurrection, we conversed with him many days, and eat and drank with him at various places and on different occasions*; could they have said this, their evidence would have been *credible* or *not*. If it would *not* have been *credible*, when they said they *saw him themselves*, it would have been as little *credible* when they affirmed that he was seen publicly by the *people*, and by consequence such a publick appearance would have been of no kind of signification. If when they said they *saw him themselves*, their testimony would have been *credible*, this would have been *sufficient* to have established the belief of it, and their giving a second-hand testimony that *the people saw him*, would have been wholly *needless*. And surely it is much stronger evidence to say, I myself was an eye-witness to such and such facts, than to be able only to say, that certain distant persons saw them, when it is not in my power to question them about it. He who is an eye-witness, should not refer to other witnesses that are absent, for that may prove a circumstance that may even discredit his own testimony. If the Apostles had affirmed that Christ appeared to all the people, that must have depended only on their testimony, and might have exposed them to many questions they could not easily have got rid of: And so we are reduced to the original difficulty, the *single testimony of the Apostles*. But as they were able to say, *we saw him, conversed with him,*  
*handled*

*banded him, and eat and drank with him, and that several times, during the space of forty days, and especially when they were enabled by God to do miracles in confirmation of their testimony in the name of Jesus, and to confer on those who believed the most extraordinary and astonishing gifts, as the proof that he was alive and even exalted to heavenly glory, this was an evidence that carried substantial weight, and could not fail of making right impressions on the minds of fair, candid and impartial enquirers.*

And to speak my mind *freely* on this important article, though I think in my judgment that all things considered, God took the *best* and *wisest* method that could be taken, for spreading the knowledge and promoting the belief of Christ's resurrection, yet it appears to me to be an article of so surprizing a nature, that I apprehend no kind of *merely human testimony* could well have been *sufficient* to have established the belief of it in the world, and that if the Apostles had only given their naked testimony to it, they would have found but few that would have credited them, or regarded the religion they taught. But when they could give themselves the *proper proofs* of a divine mission and authority by the *miracles* they performed, and could demonstrate the *life and resurrection of Christ* by the *gifts* they conferred in *his name*; this added to the *end* of his resurrection, who was to be a *prince and a saviour*, and the *excellent nature* of the religion they taught in the *name* of the crucified, risen and exalted *Jesus*, was giving the



*noblest proof of the truth of his resurrection, and could not but secure them admission, credit, and the firmest belief. And though the resurrection of Christ, considered as a single article, detached from the scheme of Christianity, may seem too surprizing to be easily believed; yet viewing it in its proper connections, uses, and moral consequence, as the part or single article of a scheme, that scheme will appear absolutely imperfect without it; and this article of it highly worthy of our acceptance and belief. Be ye therefore stedfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, since your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord, and comfort yourselves with this, that because Christ lives, you who believe in him shall live also, and be raised by his power incorruptible and immortal, to the possession of an heavenly inheritance that never fades away.*

## S E R M O N    X I.

Of Christ's Ascension.

ACTS i. 9, 10, 11.

*And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly towards heaven, as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said; Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

**T**H E S E words contain an account of our blessed Saviour's *ascension into heaven*, after having conversed with his disciples, and been *seen* of them several times, during the space of *forty days*, after his resurrection: And as this, among other articles of our faith, is called in question, and the testimony which the sacred writers give to it, is charged as self-contradictory; I shall, on this occasion, lay before you the *evidences* of this truth, and endeavour to confirm it by such arguments, as shall have no room for reasonable question

or doubt, and confirm you in the belief of this important principle of Christianity.

I would however observe, as previous to this, and all other subjects of a like nature, that the *great events*, relating to our blessed Lord, such as his *miraculous conception* by the power of the *Holy Ghost*, his *wonderful works*, his *resurrection* from the dead, and *ascension into heaven*, ought always to be considered in their *connection* with, and their *relation* to each other, and in their certain *united tendency* to promote the great *design* of the *recovery* and *salvation of men* from sin, to the knowledge and practice of true religion, in order to their obtaining the true happiness of their nature in the favour and acceptance of God, and the final possession of everlasting life and glory in the divine presence and kingdom. And in this *connected* view these facts will be so far from appearing *incredible*, as that they will carry in them the *biggest degree of probability* and truth, and each be a strong confirmation of the other. If we consider any one of these facts *abstractly* from the rest, and *independent* of the *design* that is to be answered by all of them, I should as readily allow, as any man, that they were altogether *improbable* and *incredible*. Not because contrary to the *common course* of nature, which is an idle and impertinent objection, such events being referred to the *immediate power of God*, by the confession of all who believe them; a power equally capable of producing *extraordinary* as well as *ordinary* events, or of effecting events with-  
out

out the interposition of second causes, as with them. But because it is not at all probable, that God will immediately interpose, or vary from the common course of nature, unless there be some *very high and valuable end* to be answered by it; or unless there be some design to be promoted of importance and consequence, great enough to deserve an extraordinary or unusual exertion of the power of God: And therefore if either the *resurrection* or *ascension* of Christ be considered only as *unconnected* things, and without any relation to the grand scheme of Christianity, they will appear as incredible as any of the enemies of Christianity can represent them. For who will be weak enough to believe, that a dead person ever rose to life again, if no good account can be given of the *reason* for it, or if there was confessedly no great and worthy effect, so much as pretended to be answered by it; or if the *character* of the person, said to be raised, had nothing in it remarkably great and good, that could *deserve* such an exemption from the common laws of mortality. But if we consider each event as part only of a scheme, if we consider the *extraordinary conception* of Christ's body as intended to prepare a *suitable tabernacle* for that *immortal spirit* which was to dwell in it, and to add *dignity* to his *character*, that he might be in every respect the *Son of God*,—if we consider his *miracles* as wrought in *confirmation* of the most excellent and worthy doctrine and religion—if we consider his *death* as intended by his enemies to



load his person with *infamy*, and crush his doctrine on its first publication ; and his *resurrection* as necessary to *vindicate* his person, and give *new life* and *credit*, new vigour and efficacy to his *religion* ; and to shew the world the *method* by which men must be recovered to the possession of a *future state* ; and, finally, if we consider his *ascension* to *heavenly glory* as the just *reward* of his *fidelity* to God and *benevolence* to man, and to be a *standing proof* to all ages of the world, even to the end of it, that *heaven* is reserved for the *inheritance* of *good men*, and that *Christ* himself dwells there as *their forerunner*, and under the kind character of a patron and advocate, and shall remain there, 'till he comes to the *final judgment* of the world—if we consider all these events in their connection and tendency, as having a near relation to each other, as all having their place in, and helping to form one great and excellent plan, as each necessary to the ornament and perfection of the whole, in which no one article appears superfluous, and not one can be wanting without such a manifest chasm as destroys the proportion and symmetry, the usefulness and grandeur of the whole scheme. In this view every thing appears with the most substantial marks of *credibility* and *worthy of God*, by whom the plan was originally laid, and by the immediate interposal of whose power it was conducted and accomplished.

And herein there is an infinite *difference* between the credibility of these events, as recorded of *Jesus*, and the somewhat like events, which

which are said by some prophane writers to, have happened to *other persons*, such as *Pythagoras*, *Orpheus*, *Hercules*, *Theseus*, and several others; who are reported, by *fabulous antiquity*, to have descended into the dominions of the dead, and to have returned from thence again alive \*. And of *Romulus*, who was said after his death to be *translated into heaven* and become the guardian God of the Roman state and people †. And *Apollonius Tyanceus*, whom *Philostratus*, who writes his history, represents, as *worthy of heaven*, and as called by an audible voice of one of the Gods to *ascend* thither. Besides the intire want of the evidence, of all proper *testimony*, these things carry in them partly an absolute *contradiction* to truth. The *descent* of a *living* man into the world of the dead, such as the fore-mentioned persons, pretended, being an absolute *impossibility*; and the *ascent* of the others into heaven after death, being destitute of every degree of probability; the *characters* of the persons having nothing in them that can be supposed to merit such an extraordinary favour. *Romulus* had been guilty of many enormous *violences*; and *Apollonius*, as appears by the history of him, was a vain, ambitious, superstitious pretender to wisdom and philosophy, destitute of the knowledge of the true God, and immersed in the very dregs of pagan *idolatry* and impiety. So that the objection of *Celsus*, one of the most antient writers against Christianity, against

\* See Origen. contr. Cels. p. 429. † See Livy, l. 1. c. 16.

the resurrection of Christ, that it is as fabulous and incredible, as the before-mentioned account of *Hercules's* and others descent into hell, and therefore ought equally to be rejected, is evidently of no weight, because there is nothing *impossible* in the great events which are related of *Christ*, to the divine power, nor any thing in his *character*, *unworthy* of so signal an interposition of God in his favour, nor any thing in the *facts* themselves, however extraordinary and miraculous, but what is *suited* to the evident intention of his appearance in the world, and that the most important of all designs, in which any person can be engaged, the *reformation of mankind* from ignorance, idolatry, vice and ruin, to the knowledge, worship, acceptance and favour of the true God, and the consequent possession of life and immortality: Circumstances, none of which belong or can be ascribed to any other person whatsoever.—Having premised these things, I would now consider this subject of Christ's ascension; in speaking to which I would set before you,

I. The *evidence* for the *truth* of it.

II. The *great end* and *uses* of it.

I. I would set before you the proper *evidence* for the *truth* of it, which considering the *fact* in connection with the whole of Christianity, is as satisfactory as the nature of the thing allows of, and sufficient to establish our faith and hope in it—particularly,

1. The *witnesses* to his *ascension* are *many*, who actually *saw* him in his removal from the earth,

earth, and borne up out of their sight by the clouds of heaven. The last place where he was seen was on *Mount Olivet*, in the town or village of *Bethany*, a small distance from *Jerusalem*, whither he himself led them, where he conversed with them, commanded them to return to *Jerusalem* and abide there, till they were endowed with power from on high, where he lift up his hands and solemnly blessed them, and whilst he was blessing them, was parted from them, and received by a cloud out of their sight, and the eyes of his disciples followed him as he was ascending, steadily looking towards him as he went up, till he became invisible, to the height of heaven, and in this account there are several things remarkable.

1. The place of his ascent, *Mount Olivet*, an eminence or hill, where there was less probability of the spectators being deceived than their would have been in many other places, where the view was confined and the sight obstructed, and where, had there been any intended delusion, he might have more easily conveyed himself out of their sight, and by a sudden disappearance given room for the imagination or invention of some extraordinary removal from them. But from an eminence or hill, the view around them must have been more extensive, any collusive concealment of himself from them have been more easily discovered, a real ascent into heaven more clearly seen, and the ascent itself for a longer space, and with greater distinctness pursued and attended to by the eyes of the



the beholders. So that if Christ's Ascension was to be real, an eminence or hill was the most proper place that could be chosen to rise from ; because he could be more distinctly and for the most considerable space beheld : But surely the most unsuitable of all others, if there was any fraud intended, to favour the deceit and render the imposition effectual.

2. The *ascension* of our blessed Saviour towards heaven, was *gradual*, *easy* and *slow*, not instantaneous and sudden, not violent and tempestuous. *Romulus* was said to have been lost in a furious storm of thunder and lightening, and being suddenly missed by the *people*, they were the more easily persuaded of his translation into heaven ; which the *nobles* first invented to cover the suspicion, that during the storm they had taken the opportunity to murder him ; though there is not the shadow of a pretence, that any one saw his translation. On the contrary, *Christ's ascension* was *publick*, *gentle*, and *by degrees* ; so that the eyes of the beholders steadily followed him, rose with him, as he advanced higher, and pursued him, till lost in the immensity of the height of heaven. The spectators *looked stedfastly towards heaven as he went up*, till the cloud had carried him out of their sight. 'Tis further

3. A remarkable circumstance in this account, that he was *taken from them*, as he was *actually conversing with them*, and while they were *all attentive* to him, and *receiving* his solemn *benediction*, and so incapable of being imposed on by any sudden and fallacious conveyance

veyance of himself from them. "*He lift up, his hands and blessed them,*" saith St. Luke, *and it came to pass, whilst he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven:* And the *Author of the Acts of the Apostles,* who was also unquestionably St. Luke, tells us, that he had *commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem,* and assured them, that they should *receive the Holy Ghost, and be his Witnesses to the utmost parts of the Earth,* and that *when he had spoken these things, whilst they beheld he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight,* or as the words more literally run: "*He was taken up, they themselves by and beholding him;*" so that they were actually near him; he was in the midst of them, conversing with them; instructing and solemnly blessing them, and in the midst of these transactions, *whilst they beheld him,* and their eyes were fixed on him, he arose out of their sight into the heavenly glory.

4. The number of those witnesses is strong for the confirmation of their testimony. It was in the view of *all the Apostles.* *He was taken up, after he had given commandment to the Apostles,* and as they were all assembled together, and as they themselves were beholding him. This is the express testimony of Luke concerning them; and his evidence is confirmed by the witness of many of the *Apostles themselves.* Matthew's account of the last appearance of Christ is, "*that he came and spake to them and said, all power is given unto me in heaven and earth, Lo! I am with you always, even to the*  
*end*"

end of the world\*. An account which the Apostles could not mistake the meaning of, after the many intimations he had given, and which Matthew records, of the glory he was to receive in the heavenly world; particularly, that he should come in the glory of his Father with his Angels, and then should reward every man according to his works,—that he should sit on the throne of his glory, and all nations be gathered before him, to whom he should dispense their respective rewards according to their works†. The apostle John frequently mentions this ascension of Christ, as an event he himself had most expressly foretold. Thus he spake of the hour's being come, that he should depart out of this world to the Father; of his coming from God, and going to God‡, of his going to his Father's house to prepare a place for his disciples§, of the reasons his disciples had to rejoice, because he said, he went to the Father. And after his resurrection he assures them, “I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God||.” With many other expressions to the like purpose. St. Peter assures us, that God raised him up from the dead and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God\*\*. And that he is gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God, angels and principalities and powers being made subject to him††. St. James speaks of the faith of the glory of Jesus Christ‡‡, and exhorts those to

\* Mat. xxviii. 18. 20. † Mat. xvi. 27. 25. 31. &c.  
‡ John xiii. 1, 3. § xiv. 1. || xx. 17. \*\* 1 Pet. i. 21.  
†† iii. 22. ‡‡ ii. 1.

whom he wrote, to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord\*. The author to the Hebrews tells us, he is crowned with glory and honour, and that he is passed into the heavens as our great High Priest†. St. Paul both saw him in the brightness of his glory, and assures us, that God raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principalities and powers, and might and dominion, and every name that is named; not only in this world, but also in that which is to come‡. Yea, not only the twelve Apostles, but a far larger number of persons saw him and were witnesses to his ascension: Peter in the midst of the disciples met together, in number about one hundred and twenty, spake of them all, as the companions of the Apostles, and conversant with Christ, all the time he was amongst them, from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from them§. So that though the testimony of a few, might have been more liable to objection; yet such a cloud of witnesses is greater than all exception, and an abundant confirmation of this important fact.—And though Stephen is not expressly spoken of as one who saw him actually ascend, yet, what is an equal confirmation of that fact, as he was stoned by his enemies, he cries out, “Behold I see the heavens open, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God||. St. Mark also relates the same fact, as universally known and believed

\* James v. 7. † Heb. ii. 7. 4. 14. ‡ Ephes. i. 20, 21.  
§ Acts i. 21, 22. || Acts vii. 55.



by the Christian church\*, with whom *Luke* in his gospel agrees, who tells us, that he lift up his hands and blessed them; and it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.—But

5. As the *Apostles* and the other disciples saw him ascend towards heaven, and followed him with their eyes, till through the extraordinary height he became absolutely invisible to them: So there was an angelick appearance, which assured them of his translation into the heavenly glory. Whilst they looked stedfastly towards heaven, as he went up, behold two men stood before them in white apparel: Two men, as to outward form, but by their dress discovering themselves to be angelick natures, who said; Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into heaven: This Jesus, who is taken up into heaven shall so come, viz. on the clouds of heaven, as ye have seen him go into heaven†: By which testimony they were assured, not only of his ascension into heaven, but of the certainty of his return at the time appointed by his Father for the restitution of all things.

So that when it is said by the enemies of revelation, that we have not the evidence of the *Apostles themselves* to the truth of the resurrection and ascension; but *Mark* and *Luke* tells us that the *Apostles* and others saw him, this objection appears to be in part false, since we have the expresse testimonies of *Matthew*, *John*, *Peter* and *James*, to his exaltation to the

\* Mark xvi. 19. † Acts i. 10, 11.

heavenly glory, who were of the number of his Apostles; a testimony which they have left on record in their writings, for the benefit of the Christian church, in all ages of the world. Yea, we have the *testimony* of the whole college of the *Apostles* united, and that on the most solemn and publick occasion, before the whole nation of the *Jews*, gathered themselves together from all nations at *Jerusalem* on the feast of *Pentecost*, to whom *Peter* declares, in the name of all the rest, being present,—*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses; therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear: For David is not ascended into heaven; but he says himself; the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, till I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ* \*. And again in the presence of the *High Priest* and his companions, the *Sanhedrim*, and all the senate of the children of *Israel*, being interrogated,—*Did not we strictly command you, that you should not teach in his name, and behold you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us?* *Peter* and the other *Apostles* answered, *Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree, him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and Saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins* †.

\* Acts ii. 32, 33, 34, 36. † Acts v. 21, 28, 29, 30, 31.

A testimony this to the face of his very murderers, by whom they had been before threatened for teaching this doctrine, and from whom they had reason to expect the severest treatment, if they persisted in preaching it.

The truth is, that the *publication* of the gospel *through the world* by the ministry of the *Apostles*, and their preaching it both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*, is the strongest proof of the testimony they gave to *this fact*, and leaves no possible room for questioning, whether they continually preached and attested it; for it was so essential an article of Christianity, as that the whole success of the gospel depended on it; and there could have been no satisfactory reason for believing in Christ, but on the supposition of his ascension into heaven and exaltation at the right hand of God, or to a state of the highest majesty and power in the presence and kingdom of God. And this was so *known* an article of Christianity, as was *never disputed* and denied by any, who professed to believe it; and which therefore must have been constantly and uniformly taught, as an essential and fundamental principle of it.

From what has been said it appears,

1. That the *testimony* for this fact of *Christ's ascension* is abundantly *sufficient*, since we have *numerous witnesses*, who actually were *present* and *saw* his removal to the clouds of heaven; and in such a *situation*, in which they could not be *deceived* nor imposed on by any *cunning*

ning and delusive arts. Nor would our blessed Lord have led his disciples to an *open hill*, where there could be no concealment of what was transacted, if he had any design to deceive them. *Pythagoras* is reported to have concealed himself in some secret place, for a considerable time from his disciples, and then to have returned and boasted of a resurrection. And if our Lord had any intention to have imposed on them by a false ascension; he would have *secretly conveyed himself* from them, after having told them that he should ascend, and thus put it out of their power to convict him of imposture.

2. How extraordinary soever this fact may appear *separate* and in itself, yet in *connection* with other parts of this history, it hath every circumstance of *credibility*, since it was necessary to perfect the scheme of his religion, to render him that Saviour of mankind he declared himself to be, to assure us of the favour of God, and the happiness of a heavenly life, to constitute him the intercessor and great advocate of mankind, and to support the faith and hope of all who believe in him, to vindicate the honour of his character, to remove the scandal of his death, to reward his perfect obedience to his Father's will, and encourage the practice of religion and virtue in all his disciples. And therefore

3. With what pleasure should we *remember the crucified Saviour* this day, who submitted himself to death to promote his Father's glory and the salvation of mankind; and who for



*his obedience to death was crowned with glory and honour, exalted to be universal Lord and made the Author of salvation to all who believe in him? With what chearfulness may we put ourselves under his protection? With what willingness should we obey his laws? And with what intire confidence may we trust his promises? Ascended into heaven he hath gifts to bestow of the most valuable and substantial nature, the pardon of sin, the grace of the spirit, and the privileges of eternal life: Because he lives, we, who believe in him, shall live also. Where he is, there we shall be: His entrance into heaven is on our account, to assure us that death should not have dominion over us, but that he will raise us up at the last day and give us an abundant entrance into his kingdom. Let us therefore set our affections on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and labour that whether living or dying we may be accepted, that when he shall come in the clouds to accomplish the number of his elect, we may then appear with him and be allowed to dwell for ever with the Lord.*

## S E R M O N XII.

Farther Proofs of Christ's Ascension.

ACTS i. 9, 10, 11.

*And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly towards heaven, as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said; Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

**I**N the preceding discourse I shew'd you the *credibility* of this important fact, the *ascension* of our Lord and Saviour Christ into Heaven, the *satisfying evidence* we have of the *certainty*, and pointed to the *improvement* we should make of this article of our faith. I would again engage your attention to this interesting subject; for besides those *circumstances* in the *nature of the evidence* mentioned in the foregoing discourse, there are *other arguments*, that carry in them the strongest *conviction*

viction of the truth of this *ascension* of our blessed Saviour to the heavenly glory: As particularly

1. The *conduct of the Apostles* after our blessed Saviour's *removal* from them, and when he was no more to be seen as personally present with them. He expressly and frequently foretold them that he was to leave them, and be no longer with them; a circumstance which his Apostles could not digest, nor reconcile with their own prejudices, that the *Messiah* was to abide for ever, and erect a temporal kingdom, and make the *Jews* triumph over the *Gentiles*, who had oppressed them. This was the favourite national prejudice they retain'd to the last, 'till they actually saw him taken from them, and received into Heaven out of their sight: But this at once put an end to all farther expectation of his temporal dominion. And our Lord tells them, in answer to that question, *Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israël* \*? *Ye shall receive power, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth* ||. And accordingly instead of any farther dreams of a temporal kingdom, and the conquest of the Gentiles by force of arms, soon after Christ's ascension they preached the Gospel, became witnesses of his resurrection and ascension, exhort their hearers to *repentance and faith*, and to *save themselves from that wicked generation*,

\* Acts i. 6.

|| viii. 6.

among

among whom they lived; declaring the crucified Jesus to be Lord and Christ, promising in his name the remission of sins and the gifts of the Holy Ghost to all who should believe in him. Thus laying down authoritatively and in the name of God, the terms of their salvation and acceptance, before the whole body of the Jews assembled from all parts of the world at Jerusalem.

This sudden alteration in the principles and conduct of the Apostles is truly wonderful in its nature, and can scarce be accounted for any other way, but in consequence of some very extraordinary influence on their minds; and in this view it ought to be consider'd; because it is expressly predicted by our blessed Saviour as a proof of his ascension into glory, and having received power and authority from God. There is a remarkable passage to this effect, which hath been seldom, if at all rightly explained and understood. Jesus said unto them, verily I say unto you, that ye, who have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel †.

From these words it appears, that the Apostles judging the twelve tribes of Israel, as seated upon twelve thrones, is here expressly foretold, as what should certainly happen, when Christ was seated on the throne of his glory. It is, I think, evident that this promise to the Apostles

† Mat. xix. 28.



bles refers to the *present life*. *Ye are they*, says Christ, *who have continued with me in my temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my father hath appointed unto me* †. As Christ's kingdom is *not of this world*, so neither was that kingdom which Christ appointed to his *Apostles*, but a purely *moral, spiritual kingdom*; and therefore the thrones in which they were to sit were to be answerable to the kingdom they were to receive, and the judgment they were to execute was to be suitable to the nature of that power and authority they were to exercise in this kingdom; and to this all the expressions in this remarkable prophecy exactly answer. They were to *sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. A throne, properly and in its original signification, is no more than an *exalted chair or seat* \*, in which persons of peculiar eminency and worth were placed, such as *kings, princes, or judges*: And what is immediately to our purpose, *teachers, doctors, sophists and philosophers*, were they might be more easily seen and heard by those who attended on them for instruction.

There is a passage in *Plato* exactly parallel to this in *Matthew*, and in which the very same words are made use of, and that upon a somewhat like occasion; and which, I think, will leave no doubt of the explication I shall give of this text of Scripture, which hath always been reckoned among the most difficult

† Luke xxii. 30.

\* ἑρως ἢ ἐρασιον καθιστα, *Etym. Mag.*

ones, and about which interpreters have greatly differed. *Plato* introduces *Socrates*, relating a visit he made to one *Hippias*, a *sophist* or *philosopher*. And *Socrates* says, "I found him sitting on a *throne*, and a great many persons about him; but *Hippias* seated on his throne judged, decided, or determined, and went through all the several questions which each of them put to him §." It is remarkable, that the very words are the same which the Apostle makes use of. *Hippias* as a *teacher* or *philosopher* sat on his throne: The Apostles were to sit on their thrones. *Hippias* judged, i. e. *determined the questions* of those around him. The *Apostles* were to *judge the twelve tribes of Israel*, i. e. to *teach* them by the authority of Christ the *doctrines* of his gospel, to *instruct* those who came to them for knowledge, to *determine* all the great *questions* put to them in reference to the nature of Christ's kingdom and religion. A noble instance of this we have in the determination made by the whole body of the Apostles, in reference to the pious Gentiles; when by an unanimous consent they freed them from circumcision, and observing the law of *Moses*: And, finally, they were to *judge the twelve tribes*, the whole body of the *Jews*; as they were to lay down the terms on which they were to continue the people of God, and declare them to be rejected and cut off from being his people, if they refused to comply with them. So that the plain, the literal, the

noble sense of this remarkable prophecy is, that the *twelve Apostles* should be *Christ's authorised teachers* to the whole body of the Jewish people, that they should each of them sit in the throne, the chair of authority and instruction — that they should be Christ's messengers to that nation, and the principal ministers in spreading his doctrine and erecting his kingdom among them; and that from their determination in the great things of his religion there should be no appeal, as they had *his spirit* to instruct them, and received their commission immediately from Heaven. And all this was to be the *consequence* of Christ's coming to his kingdom, or one certain *demonstration* of his *ascension to power and glory*. And how absolutely unlikely was this event ever to take place, when it was first predicted, that *twelve obscure, illiterate men*, bred up in the lowest employments of life, most of them contemptible by their very original, without education or learning, filled with the national prejudices of a temporal Messiah, who dream'd of nothing but dominion and conquest, and earthly power under him, who had no exalted sentiments of rational religion or moral virtue, nor any interest, character or reputation in their own nation, should *at once* give up all those *prejudices* they had entertained about their Messiah, devote themselves to preach his doctrine, spread it throughout the whole body of this people, teach a rational religion, the purest rules of virtue, the rewards and punishments of a future life, and a *new* method of justification,

justification, pardon and acceptance with God, *unknown* to, *untought* of by the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, and all their wisest and most learned men. This, I say, is such an event as hath no parallel in the world, is *truly miraculous* in its nature, and to be accounted for by no train and ordinary connection of common causes and effects: But when consider'd as an express *prediction* of Christ, and as a *proof* of *his ascension* into glory, and as what they were *furnished* and *fited* for, by his *immediate* influence on their minds in consequence of his ascension, the whole difficulty is immediately solved. And whilst this prediction remains on record, and the certainty of its accomplishment is preserv'd; it will be consider'd as a demonstrative proof of that ascension, and of Christ's having received all that power from God, his Father, as was necessary to his fitting them for so important and honourable a work. But

2. What is connected with this, the *gift* of the *holy spirit* in all his *extraordinary* and *miraculous operations*, is another circumstance which confirms the *ascension* and *exaltation* of our blessed Lord to heavenly power and glory. Just before our Lord's ascension he commanded his Apostles, being all assembled together, "That they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, says he, ye have heard of me. For ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence, and ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and

" ye



“ ye shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem  
 “ and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto  
 “ the uttermost part of the earth\*.” This was  
 what our blessed Lord had often promised  
 them : But here the promise is more *limited*  
 and *express* : They were not to depart from Je-  
 rusalem. It was to be given them in that  
 city, and within a few days after Christ had  
 given them this assurance : And this gift was  
 not to be bestowed, till Christ *ascended and was*  
*glorified* : And therefore was to be an evidence  
 and proof of his ascension and glorification.

Consider here wherein this gift consisted,  
 or what the gift of the spirit implied. He is  
 called the *spirit of truth*, because he was to  
 guide them into all truth : And therefore it con-  
 sisted in such an *immediate and divine illumina-*  
*tion* on their minds, as was necessary to their  
 understanding the *true nature of Christianity* ;  
 and to enable them to teach it to the world in  
 such an *instantaneous power of speaking and un-*  
*derstanding all languages*, as should render them  
 capable of conversing with those of their own  
 nation, who were born and lived in very  
 distant parts of the world, and of preaching  
 the gospel of Christ to them in those several  
 tongues, in which they had been educated,  
 according to the several countries they lived  
 in ; and in working such *plain and evident mi-*  
*racles* as might raise the attention of those  
 they preached to, convince them that they  
 were the messengers of God, and be more

effectual to persuade them to receive their messages, and believe and obey the gospel they taught them. Now this immediate communication of knowledge, this instantaneous power of speaking languages, and the ability to work miracles, were the principal gifts conveyed by the spirit; or in these things principally consisted that gift of the spirit, which Christ promised they should receive from the Father, not many days after his removal from them into heaven.

Consider further, the *end* and *design* of this gift, the purposes expressly and before-hand declared to be answered by it. He is called the *comforter*, or more properly, as the word signifies, the *advocate*. He was to plead Christ's cause, and to *confirm* it he was to enable the Apostles to become Christ's witnesses to the world, and to capacitate them to teach all mankind the great truths relating to his religion and kingdom, to *the uttermost parts of the earth*; both by inspiring them with that *full and compleat knowledge*, that was necessary to this purpose, and with that *firmness, resolution and courage*, which they needed to support them under the difficulties of such a service: And, finally, "*To convince the world* ||," i. e. many both among Jews and Gentiles, *of sin, of righteousness and judgment* †: — *Of sin because they believe not in me*, — i. e. to convince many among all nations of the wickedness of the Jews in rejecting Christ, and not believing in

|| John xvi. 8. † 9.

him, notwithstanding all the evidences he gave them of his divine mission and authority. To convince them of righteousness, because I go to my Father and ye see me no more \* : i. e. To vindicate my character and clear up my innocence and righteousness, by demonstrating that though they put me to an accursed death ; yet that after my removal from you, I live and am exalted to power and glory in my Father's kingdom and presence ; " and to convince the world of judgment," because the prince of this world is judged ; i. e. to convince them, that the Father hath committed all judgment into my hands, and hath appointed me to judge and condemn, and destroy the power of the prince of this world, i. e. of the devil, who hath long reigned over all the nations of the earth ; viz. by putting an end to that idolatry and consequent wickedness, by which he hath maintained his usurped authority over mankind. These things were expressly declared before they came to pass, as the direct intention of communicating those extraordinary gifts of the holy spirit to his Apostles. Let us then consider once more,

The correspondence between the nature of the gifts, and the end to be answered by it, or how exactly suited this extraordinary vouchsafement was to accomplish the purposes intended by it. The cause of Christ must have failed in the world after his removal out of it, without some powerful advocate to support

\* John xvi. 10.

and plead it, and maintain it against all opposition. But how gloriously, how efficaciously was his name *vindicated*, and his cause *pleaded*, by that *heavenly knowledge*, which was communicated by that *gift of languages*, by which his gospel was at once published to almost all the nations of the earth; and by those *miraculous works*, which were perform'd by faith in his name! Could any fair and impartial judge but decide in his favour, when they saw this evidence of the glory to which he was advanced, and of the divine original of that gospel that was preached by his Apostles?—Again, how could the Apostles have been competent *witnesses* for him among *all nations* without those Gifts? How could they have *taught* his religion with *perspicuity* and *authority*; unless all their false and national *prejudices* had been *removed*, and they had been *led into all truth* concerning the nature of his kingdom, the reasons of his suffering and death, and the ends of his advancement into heaven by a special illumination from above, and the conveyance of a full information in these particulars? How *slow* a progress must they have made in propagating his religion in the world, without the *knowledge of languages*, and understanding the various tongues of the several nations, where their brethren were dispersed? How long, laborious and difficult a task would the learning of them be? Indeed how *impossible* for either, or all of the Apostles, to have attained them, by any common and ordinary methods? And yet such a knowledge  
was



was absolutely necessary to render the gospel the *religion of the world*, and to the quick and speedy propagation of it among mankind.— And farther, what *credit* could they have expected? What converts could they have made to the doctrine of salvation by a crucified Saviour, without some power of *working miracles*, and giving evident proofs that God was with them? Furnished with these authentic credentials, they were sure to preach with some efficacy and success, and might bear witness to Christ with great authority and freedom; since they were sure that God would support their testimony, and put his seal to the truth of it. And, finally, how strong conviction did the communication of these gifts to the Apostles, and their imparting them to others, carry to mankind of the heinous *sin* and *wickedness* of the *Jews* in *crucifying Christ*, and *rejecting him* by an obstinate infidelity? How abundant was this proof of the *innocence* of his person and the *righteousness* of his cause, their receiving and conferring those gifts in the *name of Jesus*, as *risen from the dead*, and *ascended into glory*? Had he been an *impostor*, had he *never rose* from the dead, as the Apostles preached he did; was he *not alive* in his Father's presence, and *advanced* to the right hand of power and glory, and had he not *received of the Father gifts to confer on men*; how came the *Apostles to receive them*, merely for this purpose, to *qualify them to be witnesses for him* to the world in these respects, and to *grant them instantly to others* upon professing their belief in him,

him, and to confirm and establish them in the faith they had received? Was Jesus *dead*, how could they have been granted by him? Had he *not ascended* into heaven; what power could he have had to have vouchsafed them; as he promised the grant of them before his death, to be the great proof of his ascension and glorification? How came the prediction to be so exactly fulfill'd, if he neither rose nor ascended? This argument of Christ's exaltation to glory can never be evaded, but by denying that those gifts were ever conferred; which yet there are many of the strongest circumstances to prove, and without which it is indeed impossible that the gospel could have made so large and speedy a progress in the world; and within a *few years* after its publication, have been understood and received by such *large numbers* both of *Jews* and *Gentiles* in all nations, contrary to the *strongest prejudices*, with which the minds of all men were fortified against it; and the *furious opposition* that was made to it, wheresoever it was preached. But farther,

3. The *destruction of Jerusalem* in that signal and remarkable manner, in which it was accomplished, is a *strong confirmation* of the *ascension and glory and power and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ*: An argument this, which I apprehend hath seldom been insisted on to that advantage in which it is capable of being represented; and which therefore I shall endeavour to lay before you in a clear and forcible manner. Here then let it be con-

dered, that this *destruction* of *Jerusalem* was *expressly* and *distinctly* foretold by our blessed Saviour before the generation in which he lived should be passed away: And as an *evidence* of his *great power* and *glory*, or of his *ascension* and *exaltation* at the *right hand* of *God*. *Verily*, saith Christ, *I say unto you*, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled\*; i. e. this shall happen before the present generation of mankind, that now lives, shall be removed by death. And what these things were, we are informed in the beginning of the chapter, where our blessed Lord tells his disciples, as they were shewing him the buildings of the temple, *See ye not all these things?* *Verily I say unto you*, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. His disciples then apply to him and say, *Tell us when shall these things be*, and *what shall be the sign of thy coming* and of the *end of the world*. Christ had spoken of it as an event to be accomplished, under his direction, and as a proof of his power and majesty: And therefore they ask him what shall be the sign of thy coming? i. e. what circumstances shall be the forerunners of thy coming to the *destruction* of *Jerusalem* and the temple. Our blessed Lord gives them several, particularly, *Many shall come in my name*, saying; *I am Christ*, and shall deceive many. This was about the time in which the Messiah was expected: And accordingly many rose between

• Mat. xxiv. 34.

the delivery of this prophecy and the destruction of Jerusalem, who pretended to this character, and deceived many of the Jews by this false pretence to their destruction.—In the reign of *Claudius Cæsar*, one *Theudus* declared himself the Messiah, drew many together to follow him, and promised that he would divide the waters of Jordan for their passage; but was destroyed with his followers by *Fadus*, the *Procurator* of *Judea*†. The same *Josephus* tells us‡, that under his successor *Nero*, several *impostors* and *deceivers* persuaded the multitude to follow them into the desert, assuring them that they would there shew them many prodigies and miracles from God, which occasioned the destruction of many of them.

He says also that a certain *Egyptian* came to *Jerusalem*, proclaiming himself a *prophet*, and persuaded many of the people to go with him to the mount of Olives, and assured them that from thence they should see at his command the walls of *Jerusalem* fall down, over the ruins of which they should enter into the city, four hundred of them were slain by the soldiers of *Felix*.—*Simon Magus* also might be reckoned of this number, who boasted himself the great virtue, or *power of God*, and drew many after him. And one *Dositheus*, mentioned by *Origen*\*, who was a *Samaritan*, and declared himself to be the Son of God. As the whole nation was full of the persuasion of

† *Joseph. Ant.* l. 20. c. 5. l. 18. c. 4. § 1: ‡ c. 8. § 6.  
\* *Contr. Cels.* p. 638.



the Messiah's coming about this time, though they rejected Christ, the true Messiah, they were ready to fall in with every impostor who set up for a temporal deliverer.

Yea, *Josephus* tells us †, “ that as the *Romans* were besieging the city, and as the temple itself was burning, six thousand Jews fled into one of the remaining porticoes of the temple, persuaded by a false prophet, who told them that God commanded them to ascend thither, where they should receive salvation and deliverance; but that the Roman soldiers having set the portico on fire, they all perished, not one being saved.” The same author adds, “ that many persons were suborned by the tyrants to declare themselves *prophets*, and to assure them of help from God, to prevent the people's forsaking them and deserting to the *Romans* ;” so abundantly was this part of the prophecy fulfilled.

Again, *Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: See that ye be not troubled: For all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet: For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in divers places* ||. These things were all literally fulfilled; the whole *Roman* empire being thrown into civil wars and commotions by *Vitellius*, *Otho* and *Vespasian*. *Judea* in particular was extremely distressed by the growing appearances of sedition and rebellion against the *Roman* power.

† *B. Jud.* p. 388.

|| *v.* 6, 7.

In many nations where they lived, they were destroyed in large multitudes by the inhabitants of the countries, who hated them: In *Mesopotamia*, *Alexandria* and *Babylon*, *Cæsarea*, *Seythopolis*, *Ptolemais*, *Tyre*, *Gadara* and *Damascus*, as *Josephus* describes in most moving terms\*. Yea, he says †, almost in the words of our blessed Saviour, “that the war with the Romans was the most dreadful that ever was entered into, when cities fought with cities, and nations with nations.”

The same author tells us of a dreadful famine in *Jerusalem*, in which many perished for want, in the reign of *Claudius*: And prophane authors assure us, that in the reigns of *Claudius* and *Nero*, the most terrible earthquakes happened in *Crete*, *Smyrna*, *Miletus*, *Chios*, *Samos*, and in *Asia*; in which the cities of *Laodicea*, *Hierapolis*, *Colosse* and others perished. Again ‡, *They shall deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all men for my sake.*” Thus *Peter* and *John* were delivered to the *Sanhedrim*; *James* to *Herod*; *Paul* to *Gallio*, *Felix*, *Festus* and *Nero*, and were whipped, imprisoned, put in bonds and murdered. *Stephen* was stoned to death; and both the *James's*, one was beheaded by *Herod*, and the other condemned and stoned by the *Sanhedrim*. They were also hated by the *Jews*, and as *Tacitus* informs us, by all men, and destroyed at *Rome* in large numbers by *Nero*, as the same *Tacitus* affirms; rather through the

\* L. 20. c. 2. ult. † B. Jud. Procem. ‡ v. 9.

public odium, than for any crime that could be proved on them.—Again, *There shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever shall be.* Josephus verifies this prediction by saying, “that of all the cities which were subject to the Roman empire, our’s attained the height of felicity, and was thrown down into the *extreamest misery* §; and to say all at once, I think, says he, *no city ever suffered such things*, as no nation that can ever be named, arrived to a greater pitch or height of wickedness ||.” Again, *This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then the end shall come* †. An extremely remarkable prediction, considering the circumstances of Christ, the nature of his religion, and the hatred, to which he himself foretells christians should be subject for his name sake: And yet this was fulfilled *before the destruction of Jerusalem*; the gospel having been preached to all nations before this event, and large numbers proselyted to the faith of Christ. *After these things shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven; and the powers of the earth shall be shaken* \*. This is a figurative expression, taken from the prophets, of the great calamities of the Jewish nation, and the utter subversion of their government and nation, and of the destruction of their princes and people. It may be partly understood literally,

§ Procem. || Lib. vi. 11. † v. 14. \* v. 29.

that the Sun should be *obscured*, and the Moon *darkened* by the flames and smoke, arising from the *burning* and *destruction* of their cities; in consequence of which the stars should fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens be shaken: Their princes and nobles should be *stript* of their power and dignity, and the whole frame of their constitution and government entirely dissolved. And then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven †. i. e. Not that there should be any sign appearing in the heavens of the son of man, but the sign should appear of the son of man, who is in heaven, the token of his heavenly power and majesty should appear, viz. in the destruction of Jerusalem. Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn: The whole Jewish nation shall be in the utmost sorrow: And they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. They shall see the son of man, viz. by the effects, by signal vengeance: They shall see him coming in the clouds of heaven, i. e. swiftly, suddenly and irresistibly, or by the dreadful terrors of his anger, as though he were clothed with a dark and heavy cloud. They shall see him coming in the clouds with power and glory, with an irresistible power for their destruction, which shall manifest the glory of his state, and the height of dignity to which he is advanced; the authority he is invested with by God, his Father, and his power to take vengeance on the implacable enemies of his person and doc-



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 trine. *And he shall send his angels with a great  
 sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together  
 his elect from the four winds; from one end of the  
 heavens to the other : i. e.* as I apprehend, Christ  
 shall send his messengers to give warning to his  
 faithful disciples throughout the whole land  
 of Judea, of the approaching destruction of  
 the Jews; which shall be as effectual to save  
 them from the common calamity, as though  
 they were warned by an heavenly trumpet to  
 escape it. Though if we interpret the words  
 more *literally*, we shall not be destitute of the  
 accomplishment of the prophecy; since *Jo-*  
*sephus* † assures us, that *Jesus*, the Son of  
*Ananus*, cried out with a loud voice against  
*Jerusalem*, just before the destruction of it;  
 “ A voice from the east, a voice from the west,  
 and, in the very words of Christ, from the  
 four winds, against *Jerusalem* and the temple;  
 a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides,  
 a voice against the whole people :” And that  
 on the feast of *Pentecost* the priests, as they  
 were entering into the temple to perform their  
 offices, heard a voice crying out, “ Let us  
 depart hence.” Circumstances that were suf-  
 ficient to warn the Christians to make their  
 escape, and save themselves from the con-  
 demnation and vengeance of that people.

Now consider this destruction as *foretold* by  
 Christ in all those circumstances that have  
 been mentioned, as thus exactly *accomplished*,  
 and predicted as what should be the *sign* and

† Bel. Jud. p. 339.

*demonstration of his kingdom and glory*, and I think it will amount to such a demonstration of his being alive, and ascended into heaven, and advanced to regal majesty and power, as carries in it the strongest conviction, and is the noblest confirmation of our faith in him, as exalted to heavenly glory.

I might add, that this is frequently insisted on in the writings of the Apostles, as an event that should certainly happen in proof of Christ's glory: But this would carry me into a large field of discourse; and I shall now only add, that as this truth is thus abundantly confirmed, the whole of Christianity stands upon an immoveable foundation. The *ascension* of Christ proves his *divine authority*,—the *truth* of his religion, the *necessity* of believing in him, the *advantage* of obeying him; and justifies our hope in him of his last appearance to the universal judgment, when he shall raise the whole race of men from the grave, bring them before his tribunal, separate the good and bad, condemn the wicked to everlasting punishment, and introduce all his faithful disciples into that *heavenly kingdom* that is prepared for them from the foundation of the world; and considering these things, *what manner of persons should we be in all holy conversation and godliness.*

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## S E R M O N XIII.

### The Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles.

ACTS ii. 1, 2, 3, 4.

*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance.*

**S**T. Luke, the author of these *Acts* of the Apostles, tells us, that our blessed Saviour, just before his ascension, being assembled together with his Apostles, whom he had chosen, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but should wait there for the promise of the Father, or for the accomplishment of that promise which he had made them in his Father's name, viz. the promise of that holy spirit of truth, that should guide them into all truth\*.

truth\*. For thus our Lord adds: *John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence.* And though the heads and hearts of the Apostles were still full of notions about the *temporal* power of the *Messiah*, and of the restoration of a temporal kingdom to Israel, yet our blessed Lord tells them, that as the effect of their receiving the spirit of God, they should become *witnesses to him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.* When Christ had spoken these things, a cloud received him out of their sight, upon which they returned to Jerusalem according to their master's order, where they continued in prayer and supplication, expecting the accomplishment of this wonderful promise. And accordingly in about ten days after the ascension of Christ, and the giving this promise of the spirit to the Apostles, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, and they were all with one accord in one place, there came suddenly a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance, i. e. to preach the gospel to persons of different languages, who were then met at Jerusalem from the most distant parts of the world, in that language which each particular person

\* John xvi. 13.



spoke, and had been educated in. This is the account given of this great and marvellous event by the sacred writer, which justly astonished all who were witnesses to it, and is an event the most extraordinary in its nature, and which derives the highest honour and credit to the Apostles and the religion of Jesus Christ. And in speaking to it, I shall consider,

I. The *nature* of the *fact* itself.

II. Some *peculiar circumstances* attending it. And

III. The *proof* it carries in favour of our *Lord's character*, the *divine mission* of his *Apostles*, and *authority* of his *religion*.

I. I am to consider the *nature* of the *fact* itself, as recorded by the sacred Historian, and it consists of these particulars. As the Apostles were all sitting together,

1. *There came from Heaven a sound, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting; from which account it doth not appear, that there was any violent blast of wind perceived, or that actually filled the room; but only that there was a sound heard by them throughout the whole apartment, that resembled the noise of a violent driving wind. The wind and the sound of it, were emblems of the divine appearance and presence, both amongst sacred and profane writers. Thus our first parents are said to have heard the voice of the Lord God, walking in the garden in the cool of the day †: Or as I*

† Gen. iii. 8.

should

should rather render the words more literally : *They heard the sound of the Lord God, walking in the garden, in the wind of the day* ; in which passage the word *walking* is not to be referred to God, as though he was described walking, but to that *sounding wind*, or rather to that awful sound, which was brought to their ears by the wind, the sound coming from the quarter from whence the wind blew, and growing stronger and stronger as the *Shechinah* more nearly approached them. And thus we have expressly, *the sound or voice of the trumpet walking* †, and greatly encreasing. Nor can I help observing, that the expression of God's *voice walking in the garden*, is very emphatical in the original *Hebrew* ; the verb being in that form, which denotes the great *intenseness* and *frequency* of any thing ; and should have been rendered, to do justice to the energy and spirit of that language, they heard the Lord God's sound or voice come with *encreasing terror* rushing on, according to the course of the wind. So that this awful sound of the wind, was the *emblem* of the *presence of God*. Many other passages of like nature might be mentioned ; but I shall only add, that on this account 'tis said, that *God flies on the wings of the wind* § ; because the sound conveyed by it is the symbol of his majesty and glory. This sound therefore, that filled the house where the Apostles sat, *like a mighty rushing wind*, was the *prelude* to the appearance of a more

† Exod. xix. 19. § p. i. 18, 10.

visible glory of God, and of that divine presence that manifested itself in the communication of the extraordinary gifts of his own blessed spirit. For

2. Immediately after this sound, there appeared unto the Apostles cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. Commentators differ in the explication of these words. I shall not recount those differences, only give you what appears the natural plain sense of them. There suddenly appeared to the view of the Apostles several tongues, which seemed divided in the midst, and looked like fire, i. e. bright, luminous, and sparkling like fire; which fire, or luminous appearance, in the shape of divided tongues, sat upon the heads of the Apostles, each one having this emblem of the spirit of God on his head, so that each of the Apostles, and whoever else was present with them, saw on the head of all the other Apostles the same form or shape of a divided fiery tongue, that rested upon himself. The appearance here was natural and suited to the gift bestowed. The tongue that rested on the head of each of them denoted the consequence of a new tongue or language, that he was enabled to speak with. The tongues were divided, to shew they had communicated to them the knowledge of different languages. They had the appearance of fire, to denote probably the purity of their doctrine, and the power and efficacy that attended it; and this gift was attended with this external sign and emblem, to shew that it was truly miraculous, the emblem itself being

being evidently extraordinary and *supernatural*; and the more effectually to draw the attention and regard of all the spectators and auditors, to what should be delivered by these men, who were thus seen by miracle prepared to speak to them. But,

3. In consequence of this, the Historian relates, *that they were all filled with the Holy Ghost*; or with those variety of gifts, proceeding from the immediate inspiration of the spirit of God, that were *necessary* to fit them to be *witnesses* of Christ, and the *authorised preachers* of his religion to the whole world. And undoubtedly as our blessed Saviour had promised them this gift of the spirit, to *lead them into all truth*, relating to the nature of his kingdom, and the doctrines of his gospel, so one principal part of the meaning of the expression, of their being *filled with the Holy Ghost*, was, their being by his immediate influence, inspired with a *clear and distinct view* of the *design* of his coming into the world, of the *power* he was to exercise, of the *government* he was to erect, of the *laws of his kingdom*, and of every thing that related to that new institution of religion, which was now to be established in the world by their doctrine and ministration. For the gift of tongues was not designed to be a mere *useless* gift, but to be properly exercised. But this they could not have done, had not their minds been first illuminated with the knowledge of their great master's doctrine, and their former national *Jewish prejudices* and misconceptions concerning



ing their Messiah been *cured*; had they not been taught themselves what they were to teach others, and qualified by an infallible knowledge of Christ and him crucified, to become the instructors of the world in this excellent doctrine, in these *unsearchable riches of Christ*. And this was in reality the *fact*. For though *before* this effusion of the spirit of God on them, they had the same worldly carnal sentiments of the Messiah and his kingdom, yet *now* they appear quite *changed* from their former selves, and in their first publick discourse to their brethren, they speak in a quite different language, and expressly declare, that the *crucified, raised Jesus, exalted by God's right hand, ascended into Heaven*, and who had *received and poured out the Holy Spirit*, was constituted and appointed both *Lord and Messiah*. And as they were thus themselves enlightened by being filled with the Holy Ghost, in order to enable them to preach the same doctrine to their brethren *throughout all the world*.

4. The Historian farther remarks, *they began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance*. The things they spoke were, *the wonderful works of God* †, such things as related to the *designs* of his *providence*, the *accomplishment* of the *ancient prophecies*, and the *character and kingdom of the Messiah*, the *doctrines* he taught, and the *miraculous works* God performed by Christ; things that were *worthy of God*, and evidently appeared by the extra-

† Ver. 11.

ordinary nature of them, to be spoken under his *immediate direction* and *inspiration*. And these things they spoke *with other tongues*, i. e. freely and intelligibly in *other languages*, than that which was their *native* one, and the only language which hitherto they had ever understood. When this inspiration was given to the Apostles, *there were at that time dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under Heaven*, where any Jews resided; many Jews that had come from all parts of the world where they were dispersed; partly because of the feast of Pentecost, when all the males throughout the whole country of Judea were to repair to Jerusalem; and principally, because about this time they knew their Messiah was to come, all the prophecies tending to and centering in this season. On this account the more religious Jews, *who waited for the consolation of Israel*, came home from the most distant countries, to fix their dwelling at Jerusalem, there to enjoy the presence, and share the blessings of the Messiah's government; persons from *Parthia, Media, Elamitis, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Lybia, Italy, Crete, and Arabia*, from all the most distant parts of the world, where any of the Jews had inhabited. Now the Jews from all these countries *heard the Apostles speaking in that which was the peculiar language of the country in which they had been born* ||. Every man

|| Ver. 6.

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heard them speak in his own language. *We bear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God †.* 'Tis a vain and groundless imagination of some writers, that the Apostles had not the gift of any languages at all, but that they spoke in their own *native dialect*, and God *miraculously* caused the persons who heard them *to understand them*, as though they had spoken to each severally in his own language, though they did not. For this is contrary to the whole strain of the New Testament, when speaking of this subject. Our Saviour says expressly, *that they should speak with tongues §.* In this chapter where my text is, the Apostles are said to *speak with other tongues †.* Amongst the *Corinthian* converts, there were the two different, yet sister gifts of *tongues*, and *the interpretation of tongues*; and St. Paul declares he *spoke with more tongues than all of them.* Not to add, that had this been the case, the miracle would have been wrought on the hearers, and not on the Apostles, and would scarce have been an authentic evidence of their divine mission and inspiration. Nor would the *emblem of tongues* have been rightly chosen, had this been the fact, but that instead of these resting on the Apostles, *ears of fire* would have appeared to, and settled on the *heads of the bearers.* But the whole account proves the contrary, *viz.* that the *Apostles spoke the different languages* of these several countries, from whence the foreign Jews had travelled, now to

‡ Ver. 11.

§ Mark xvii. 17.

† Ver. 4.

fix their residence in Jerusalem. And that we may not imagine there was any *disorder* or confusion amidst so many speakers, who spoke different languages, the Historian adds: *That they spoke as the spirit gave them utterance, i. e.* each spoke that particular language which the spirit of God dictated to him, and in *that order and season* as the same spirit directed him. For the account shews, that this whole affair was conducted in the most regular manner, so that all heard them speak *distinctly* the great things of God, and each heard them in his own language distinctly, so as to be judge of what was spoken, and of the propriety of the words in which each speaker delivered himself. This is that great event, the remembrance of which had been kept up in the Christian church, and annually celebrated on this *festival of Pentecost*. And it is one of the *most miraculous facts* that ever was recorded, and is the *most substantial proof* of the divine influence on the minds of those, who were thus instantaneously endowed with a facility of speaking languages they had never studied and understood, and which without a miracle can never be attained, but by long study, frequent practice, and repeated converse with those to whom the language we learn is familiar and natural. But there is a question on this subject of some difficulty, though of no great importance to the interest of Christianity, *viz.*

Whether the *Apostles only* were at this season endowed with this extraordinary gift of



tongues, or whether it was not also communicated to the 120 disciples, *that were met together with the Apostles* \*, when they proceeded to the choice of one into the Apostolate, in the room of Judas Iscariot, who had destroyed himself? Those who think that the 120 disciples were *equally endowed* with this gift, with the Apostles themselves, found it upon their being *present* with them at the election of *Matthias*; but to this it may be answered, that it doth by no means follow, that therefore they were present with the Apostles when this gift was conferred upon them; and the connection of the history seems to intimate they were not. For immediately after 'tis said, *that Matthias was numbered with the Eleven Apostles* †, 'tis added: *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they, viz. the Apostles, were all with one accord in one place* ‡. And when Peter, in answer to those who mocked, and said they were full of new wine stood up, with the ELEVEN, he said to them, *these men are not drunken, as ye suppose* §, evidently turning the eyes of the audience to the persons of those who stood up with him. But what seems the most decisive in the case is: That the *promise* of the spirit, in this first extraordinary visible descent of him, seems to have been peculiarly made by our blessed Lord to his Apostles only. *I will, saith Christ, pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever* ||. He

\* Acts i. 15. † Acts i. 25. ‡ Acts ii. 1. § Ver. 14, 15.  
 || John xiv. 16, 17.

*dwelleth in you, and shall be in you. And when the comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall testify of me \*. If I go not away the comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you.—He shall guide you into all truth—and he shall shew you things to come †. And in his last meeting with the Apostles whom he had chosen, he commanded them to wait at Jerusalem, for the promise of the Father, which they had heard of him, assuring them, that they should be baptised with the Holy Ghost, not many days after this ‡. So that as this promise of the spirit, in its first effusion, was evidently confined to the Apostles, I apprehend they only were the persons who at this time received it. Especially if to this we add: That this promise was confined to them for very peculiar and special reasons: To teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Christ had said unto them §. It was to guide them into all truth, even into the knowledge of those truths, which before this gift they could not bear ||, i. e. were not disposed to receive; and what is principally to be regarded, to qualify them, and point them out to the world, as the authorised, authentick witnesses of Christ, of all he taught, what he had suffered, and how he was risen from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God. Ye shall receive power, says Christ, or authority, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses to me*

\* John xv. 26. † John xvi. 7, 13, 14. ‡ Acts i. 2, 4, 5.  
§ John xiv. 26. || John xvi. 12, 13.

in Jerusalem—and unto the uttermost parts of the earth\*. Now had the spirit descended on all the 120 in the same visible and miraculous manner as he did on the Apostles themselves, there would have been *no distinction* of honour and privileges made between the Apostles and them; but the 120 disciples would have been *equally* pointed out as Christ's witnesses to the world, with the twelve Apostles, which seems contrary to the most express promises of Christ, and therefore cannot be easily admitted. But thus much of the nature of the gift itself. And upon the whole it appears,

1. To have been truly *extraordinary* and *miraculous*. 'Tis not without *much care* and *repeated instruction*, that children attain to the knowledge and right pronunciation of, and a facility of speaking their native language; and the reason of their speaking it with fluency, ease and exactness, is because by being *habituated* to it from infancy, their organs of speech are more easily formed for a right pronunciation, and they insensibly enter into, and by daily use remember, the idiotisms or peculiarities of expression, and style of the language they are educated in. All this is much *more difficult* to persons of *riper years*, who though by long and diligent application they may attain to the *knowledge* of foreign languages, so as to read them with perfect understanding, and even to *speak* them and con-

verse in them *intelligibly*; yet for want of being early taught to speak them, they generally retain a *somewhat* in the manner of their pronunciation, that betrays the language not to be their mother one, but instantly discovers a defect to all sensible natives. But that any one man should *instantly* speak a language he never knew, and speak it with *propriety* and *ease*, this is *impossible* in the nature of the thing, without a divine illumination, and an *immediate inspiration from God*; to whom as all languages, and all things are perfectly known, so he is able by his spirit instantaneously, to convey the same knowledge, in whatsoever degrees, and to whatsoever persons he pleases. And though the gift be in itself the *most extraordinary* one that 'tis possible to conceive of; yet if the *end* to be answered by it, in the moral government and providence of God, be of importance enough to deserve and require such an extraordinary communication from his spirit; then as there is this connection and harmony of *importance* between the *end* and the *means*; the means will no more appear *incredible* because *miraculous* in this instance, than in any *other* case, where the means and the ends are but just answerable to one another. The only possible circumstance that can make what is called a miracle *incredible*, is not the thing itself, which to God is as easy as any of the operations of nature, which in truth are all of them the effects of his constant active power; but the *impropriety* of the thing, when 'tis introduced



and pretended to where there is no sufficient end to be answered by it, when the same effect, which the miracle is alledged for, could be as well and as easily accomplished without it; and, in a word, when there appears nothing great, peculiar and extraordinary, to render the miraculous interposition worthy of God, and expedient and necessary to answer some great design of his moral government over mankind. When such a design as this can evidently be pointed out, 'tis impertinent to alledge the incredibility of the thing, because extraordinary and miraculous; for considering God as the agent, nothing is extraordinary or miraculous to him; and if the miracle and design of working it be proportionable, there is as much of nature, fitness and propriety in this case, as in any other that can be mentioned. And therefore I would observe,

2. That no miraculous interposition whatsoever could have been better *adapted to time and circumstances, and the intention* to be answered by it, than this of the miraculous communication of languages to the Apostles. It might seem a very *strange promise* of Christ to his Apostles, just before his ascension to glory, that they should be *his witnesses in Judea and to the uttermost parts of the earth*, i. e. teach his doctrine and religion to their brethren, in all the different nations of the earth where they lived. They might well wonder and say; *How can this be, seeing we know not the languages of the nations?* And indeed the thing was *naturally*

*turally impossible* for them. 'Twas a promise never to be accomplished *without a miracle*. But what could be more *admirably suited* to this important purpose, than this miraculous gift of tongues, whereby this promise of our Saviour was *literally and instantly fulfilled*, the gospel at once revealed to persons of *every nation*, and a foundation laid on which to gather churches amongst *all people*, and to convert the world to the knowledge and worship of the one only living and true God. And if the rescuing the world from ignorance, superstition, idolatry, impiety and vice, and the recovery of all nations to truth, rational religion, exemplary virtue, and real happiness; if this benevolent purpose was *worthy the expence of a miracle*, as methinks it looks as if 'twas worthy of it; *this miracle* of the gift of languages was *worthy of God*, as it *qualified the Apostles* effectually and instantly in part to bring about this kind design. And it must be said to the honour of these *twelve Galileans*, for such all the Apostles were, that though they frequently pretended to miracles, yet they never introduced them upon an *improper* occasion, and always made choice of such, as could be referred to no other but a divine original, and were as *great, important and fit*, as tho' God himself had made choice of them on the occasion, and actually wrought them for the purposes they are intended to establish. But I now proceed

II. To lay before you some *remarkable circumstances* attending this very extraordinary and mira-

miraculous event; and here are many that offer themselves to our consideration. As

1. The *character and education of the persons*, who were *all Galileans*, and universally known *to be such*; for the multitude of Jews, that were drawn together upon the report of this surprizing event, were *amazed and marvelled* on this very account, *saying one to another: Behold, are not these which speak, all Galileans? How then hear we every one of them in our own tongue wherein we were born?* This was one principal reason of their amazement, that *Galileans* should speak in their several native languages. Nothing was more contemptible to the polite and learned Jews than a Galilean, and it was a *maxim* with them, *that out of Galilee no prophet could arise*. Besides, somewhat in their very *manner* of speaking, that was disagreeable to the other Jews; they were reckoned a rude, unpolished, illiterate, and ignorant set of men, from whom no knowledge or learning, or any thing great or good was ever expected. And as to these *Apostles and witnesses of Christ*, they had been *bred up* in low, laborious, servile employments, being *fishermen and publicans*, and so partly despised, and partly hated by the other Jews; and were known *never* to have had the advantages of a *liberal* education, to have been cultivated by, and trained up in the liberal arts and sciences, or taught any kind of languages besides their native one. When they were first convened before the High Priest, to give an account, *by what power, and by what name they had done*  
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the good deed to the impotent man, whom they cured of his lameness, 'tis observed by the Historian, that their examiners perceived *that they were unlearned and ignorant men, and that they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus \**, i. e. that they had been his followers and disciples. So that there is not the least pretence for any suggestion, that they had acquired the knowledge of the languages they spoke by *education or previous study*, or that they had *travelled*, like some of the ancient lawgivers and philosophers, into foreign nations, and by converse with wise and learned men, there acquired their skill in the tongues they spake in, or of the extraordinary things in which they instructed their hearers. Their whole history is a contradiction to any supposition of this kind. And

2. Their *number* is considerable. *Twelve men*, of no rank and character in their own country, appear at once in the most *publick scene* of life, set up for *divine authoritative teachers* of mankind, and *speak various languages* they had *never before* had the least knowledge of or acquaintance with. Had *one* of them only pretended to this extraordinary skill, and spoke in a *language or two* different from his native one, there might have been some suspicion of *delusion*; and that he had been *privately studying* those tongues, and at the proper time, after having in some good measure perfected himself in the knowledge of them,



at length ventures to set up under the presence of inspiration, and to claim the character of a prophet and teacher immediately sent from God. But that such a *number* of men, as the Apostles were, who had been *bred* up to *servile* employments, till the time of their attendance on Jesus, and who had been his followers but about *three* years, should all at *once* discover this amazing knowledge, can never be accounted for by the imagination or suggestion, that it was the effect of previous study and learning. Especially as it doth not appear, that the Apostles had any one of them the least conception or apprehension of ever receiving this gift, during the whole life of Christ. The only hint he appears ever to have given them of it, was *after his resurrection*, and but a very few days before their thus speaking in publick, when he told them : *These things shall follow them that believe ; in my name they shall cast out devils, and they shall speak with new tongues* †. This was but about ten or twelve days before they actually thus spoke ; so that the gift appears as much unexpected and as really surprizing to them, as it was to those who heard them speak. But

3. The *number of languages and dialects* they spake is as truly amazing as the *number* of men that *spoke* them ; languages not only different in *dialect* from one other, but *essentially* and in the very constitution and frame of

† Mark xvi. 17.

them. The *Galilean*, *Hebrew*, *Syriac*, and *Arabic* languages, were all but different dialects of the *same* tongue, but *essentially* different from the *Parthian* and *Median*, as these were from the *Greek* and *Roman*; and these again from the *Ægyptian*, *Cretan*, *Lybian*, and others mentioned by the sacred writers. The knowledge of these, so as to speak readily and with propriety, is *more* than enough almost for any one single *life*; especially for *private* men, who have never had the advantage of any long converse with foreigners. And though by long study all these different languages mentioned may be so far *understood*, as to be *read* with tolerable ease, yet to *speak* and *pronounce* them *readily* is in the nature of the thing absolutely impossible, without actually living with those who speak them, and learning the pronunciation by habitual use and converse. Consider farther

4. The *place* where they pretended to this knowledge and gift of new and foreign languages. 'Twas not in some secret or obscure part of *Galilee*, where no proper witnesses could be present with them; nor in the midst of a few *ignorant*, illiterate persons, upon whom they might make any unintelligible cant or jargon, pass for new and foreign tongues, without any fear of contradiction, or discovery of the imposture. But 'twas in *Jerusalem* itself, the capital of *Judea*, where great numbers of learned *Jews* and *Proselytes* repaired; in the presence of these collected from all nations, they pretended to speak in their  
several

several different languages, without fear or apprehension of being detected in their false pretensions to speak languages they knew not, or being corrected by the best judges of those languages for the impropriety of their speech, either in the false pronunciation of words, or the undue application and use of them, contrary to the nature and rules of the language they spoke. And this is the more to be regarded, because though there is no reason to conclude, that the spirit of God, in the miraculous communication of a language to any person, should communicate to such person the *flowers of rhetoric*, or the *rules of oratory*, as they are laid down by men, which are often times unnatural, false, and unbecoming the dignity of grave, sublime and important subjects; yet it seems reasonable to conclude, that so much of a language as was conveyed, should be so far conveyed in its *purity*, and with such *propriety* as was necessary to render what was delivered in it *easy* and *intelligible* to all that heard it, and to preserve it from being received with contempt, upon account of any great inaccuracies, solecisms and barbarisms in the language in which 'twas delivered. This must necessarily have excited laughter and derision in the hearers, who would not easily have persuaded themselves, if sensible and considerate men, to believe, that God should make a false conveyance of a language, when he was able to make a proper and a genuine one. And as any thing of this kind must have been discovered

covered in the speech of the Apostles, had what they spoke been liable to such a charge; and as they were peculiarly liable to inaccuracies of this kind, had they spoke only from themselves, upon account of the subjects of which they treated, as being intirely new, and to which the several tongues in which they spoke had never been applied, so that there were no determinate, fixed, usual terms, and forms of speech, under which to couch the doctrines they delivered; their speaking boldly and without hesitation, on such novel subjects, in such various languages, and in the presence of those who had been born and bred up in the use of them; shews either such an impudence as must have destroyed its own design, and fixed them for ever under the reproach of impostors; or such an absolute knowledge of the language they spoke, so far as they needed to speak it, as must either have been the effect of long study, diligent reading, and frequent converse; or, as this could not possibly be the case of the Apostles, of an *immediate inspiration* from the spirit of all knowledge and truth. Again,

5. The *particular time* when this extraordinary gift was conferred, deserves also to be taken some notice of. 'Twas when *the time of Pentecost was fully come* \*. The word *Pentecost* signifies the *fiftieth-day*, the fiftieth day from *Easter*, exclusive of *Easter-day*. This was a solemn festival among the Jews, when

\* Acts ii. 1.



all the males throughout the whole country were to appear at Jerusalem. It was the day when they offered the first fruits of the harvest unto God, and when there was the greatest concourse of people met together in the capital for this purpose †. 'Twas on this account partly, that so large a number was from all quarters of the world assembled at this time, and which therefore, had there been any fraud or fallacy in this affair, known or meditated, had been highly improper, as it would have been *liable* to a more *repeated* and *critical* examination, and therefore more certainly and fully discovered. But our *Apostles* seem to have used no kind of worldly prudence in things of this nature, nor to have provided any guards against detection, and as little to have dreaded any thing of the scandal of a discovery. There is every appearance of openness and integrity in their conduct, and as they acted just as circumstances and opportunities offered themselves, and appeared fit and proper; they took no care to provide against consequences, but left that entirely to God, in whose name they spoke, and to whom they ascribed every thing that appeared extraordinary and miraculous in their doctrine and works. But it is also observed, that this feast was celebrated as a *memorial* of giving the law from Sinai, which was delivered on this day of *Pentecost*, delivered indeed to a *particular* people, and for special uses and

† Numb. xxviii. 26.

purposes. And on the *same* day it pleased God to promulgate, not to a particular nation, but as it were to the *whole world*, the *new dispensation* and covenant of the *gospel*; and as the *first fruits* were offered on this day, by which the whole after harvest was consecrated to God, so the *first fruits of the nations* were this day presented to God by their conversion to Christ, and were the pledge of the future conversion of the world to the knowledge and belief of his gospel; or rather the *Apostles themselves* were through these extraordinary gifts, separated and consecrated to God as the first fruits of the after harvest, and as his chosen instruments, by which the good seed of the gospel was to be sown in the world, sure, under the watering of Heaven, to rise up in the noblest abundance and encrease. Again,

6. The *nature of the miracle* was such, as rendered it of all others the *least capable* of being *delusive*, and carrying in it any fraud or imposition upon others. There are ways of imitating and counterfeiting real miracles, so that it may not in some cases be easy to distinguish the true from the false. *Slight of hand* will do many surprizing things, that ignorant people will scarce know how to account for without a miracle. Persons well versed in *mathematicks, experimental philosophy, chemistry,* and the like arts, can easily effect, what will astonish persons who are wholly unacquainted with those sciences, and the principles upon which those who understand them act. *Pha-*

*raab's magicians* imitated some of the miracles of *Moses*, by producing serpents, and blood and frogs, either *really*, or by some *deception* of the eye. If a disease be instantaneously cured, it may be accounted for, either by having recourse to the strong imagination of the patient, or by the secret conveyance of some powerful remedy, or by some collusion between the diseased person and the curer. In many cases of this kind, there will be room for suspicion and various conjectures, where the whole of the affair cannot be known, and where some very important circumstances are secreted, which if known would naturally account for the miraculous appearance. But in this case there is no possible room for any suspicions of this kind. The speaking *one new language instantaneously* is, according to the *natural* course of things, absolutely *impossible*; for one to speak *two* or *three* new tongues instantaneously, is *more* so. For *two*, for *five*, for *twelve* to do this, at the same time and place, and in the same manner, still greatly *heightens* the impossibility. When any new language is spoken in the hearing of one to whom it is *native*, he cannot be deceived in what he hears and understands. His ears make a faithful report, and he is absolutely and infallibly certain that there can be no deception in the nature of the language, in his own mother tongue, in which another converses with him. For though imagination may sometimes possibly help forward and expedite a cure, yet *imagination* can never make

an *Arabian* think, that a man who speaks *Greek*, is then speaking good *Arabick*, or make an *Englishman*, that knows nothing of *French* or *German*, understand another that is speaking in one or other of those languages, or cause any one to believe that a man who talks a *foreign* language is at the same time talking to him in his *mother tongue*; much less will it operate so strongly on numbers of men of different nations and languages, as in the present case; much less operate on them all of a *sudden*, without previous instruction, knowledge, or preparation; much less still operate in favour of men they *never knew*, or possibly heard of; or if they had, only heard of them to their disadvantage, and as men *despised, censured, and hated* by the whole body of the nation. So that there could be no imposition or fraud in this case, and whether they spoke those languages or not, might be as certainly and infallibly known, as whether they did, or did not speak at all. Those to whom these languages were native were actually present, and so could not be deceived in the judgment they formed. And therefore farther,

7. As there could be no possible *deception* as to the *fact*, whether it was pretended or real, whether the Apostles spoke different languages or not; so the *notoriety* of the fact deserves to be regarded, and there are the strongest considerations that evince the truth and certainty of it. The *Apostles spake* these languages in the hearing of a *multitude of per-*



sons, who were confounded when they heard every man speaking in his order in their own language. They knew them to be Galileans, illiterate, and uneducated, and that they never had this knowledge by instruction and study. And the thing appeared so miraculous and astonishing to them, that they said one to another, *what meaneth this* \*? Or as the words should have been rendered: *What will this come to?* And when some, who understood not the languages they spake, imagined they spoke unintelligible gibberish, and imputed it to their being drunk with new wine; the Apostles take a method for their own vindication, which none but fools or mad men could have done, upon any other supposition, but the *reality* of the miracle, and the assured consequence that it was from God. For in the first place, they put their own and their master's characters upon the reality of it, and were willing that he and they should stand or fall, according as it was certain or not. For they urge this as a proof of the certainty of his resurrection and advancement to his Father's right hand. *This Jesus hath God raised up* †; therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear §. So that here was a solemn publick appeal to a multitude of people, in answer to the charge of their uttering drunken nonsense and jargon, that they spoke the languages of the persons there present,

\* Ver. 12.

† Ver. 32.

§ Ver. 33.

and that this was owing to the inspiration of the spirit of God, shed on them by Christ, in virtue of his advancement after his resurrection, to the right hand of his Father's glory. How effectually had they been put for ever to silence, had this fact been then solemnly and publickly denied by the multitude, and the name and character of Christ and his Apostles never more been spoken of, but under the infamy of being notorious and convicted impostors. The Apostles of Christ all declared, that the truth of his being the Son of God, and the promised Messiah, depended on the certainty of his resurrection; and now they venture the truth of this foundation fact upon the *certainty* of their *speaking languages instantaneously*, which they never understood, or spoke before. So that they gave their adversaries full scope and room to destroy, if they could, the whole of their pretensions, even from their infancy; appealing to facts as their vouchers, and defying all the malice, fraud and subtlety of their worst enemies, to contradict or deny them. Glorious proof of their integrity, and of the goodness of their cause! for 'till these two facts, of the *resurrection of Christ*, and the *gift of tongues at Pentecost*, can be disproved, the Christian religion, as supported by those miraculous deeds, will appear *worthy of all acceptance*, not only upon account of the *excellency* of its own *nature*, and internal constitution, but as a *divine revelation*, supported by the most authentick and unquestionable testimony of God. But

what carries the conduct of the Apostles to the utmost height of presumption and insolence, upon the supposition of their acting a *known imposture*, or argues the most abject *stupidity* and *jolly*, if they were under the delusion of an *enthusiastick* fanatical spirit, is: That they not only put the truth of their master's exaltation, and their own veracity as his witnesses, upon the certainty of *their having received* this miraculous gift of tongues *themselves*, but upon the *communication* of it to *others*, if they would *repent, be baptized, and believe in Jesus* whom they preached. For thus saith the Apostle expressly, and without hesitation, *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off\**, i. e. even to the Gentiles themselves, *even to as many as the Lord our God shall call*. Could any man of common sense and prudence give such an assurance as this, without the fullest certainty that he could make good the promise, and thus put it into every man's power to convict him of so notorious a falshood, and give the lye to such a solemn and publick declaration as this? But that this was not a vain and fallacious promise, is evident from the *whole history* of the *propagation of the gospel*, from *all St. Paul's epistles*, from his *appeals* to the several churches who had these miraculous

\* Acts ii. 38, 39.

gifts of the spirit, and to which he appeals as the substantial proofs of his apostleship, and in vindication of himself from the aspersions of those, who depreciated his character, and set themselves up in direct opposition to him; a circumstance that must inevitably have ruined his reputation and character, had the fact he appealed to been false, and had those he appealed to for the truth of it been able to disprove it. But,

8. Farther, I have before observed, that the vouchsafement of this gift of the holy spirit, in the miraculous endowments and powers conveyed by it, was *extremely proper*, and *well suited* to the circumstances of the time when given, as it made way for the *speedy propagation* of the gospel amongst all nations; and I would now add, that it was proper, and even in some measure *necessary*, to *settle a very important point*, on which the success of Christianity, and its propagation amongst the Gentile nations entirely depended. It was the firm *persuasion* of the *Jews*, even of those generally too who had *embraced Christianity*, that to believe and obey the gospel was not *sufficient* to justification and salvation, without an *intire conformity to the law of Moses*, which they urged as absolutely necessary to *Gentiles* as well as *Jews*, in order to their acceptance with God. This was a case of the utmost consequence in its own nature, and which required an express and decisive determination; inasmuch as the credit, honour, and prevalence of the gospel doctrine de-



pened on it. Now what could more effectually settle this point than the testimony of the spirit of God himself? As his miraculous descent on the Apostles was full evidence of their being authorised witnesses of Christ, and that God had separated them to and qualified them for this sacred service, so the same gifts of the spirit, wherever they were vouchsafed, were as certain an evidence that the persons who received them were accepted of God, and allowed by him, without any farther qualifications, to belong to the church and kingdom of the Messiah; and that therefore if they were communicated to *uncircumcised Gentiles* upon their faith, as well as to *circumcised Jews* upon theirs, and to neither, but as the immediate consequence of their believing; the inference from hence was clear and undeniable, that God put no difference between the believing Jew and Gentile, and that therefore *circumcision was nothing, and uncircumcision was nothing* in God's esteem, and that *faith itself* was abundantly sufficient to justification, without borrowing any assistance from the law of Moses. And this was the determination actually made in this case. For Cornelius and his family, who were *uncircumcised Gentiles*, upon their believing the gospel, as preached by Peter, immediately received the Holy Ghost; and this was allowed to be a full justification of his conduct in baptising them without circumcision; for even those who contended with him and censured him for doing it, yet when they heard this account, held their peace, no longer blamed the

the Apostle ; but *glorified God*, and in the astonishment of their heart said : *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life* †. Of so great a consequence was this sacred gift to Christianity, not only for the more *speedy propagation* of it, but even to *settle and fix* the fundamental *terms* of mens acceptance with God, and sharing in the benefits of the gospel salvation. And this also abundantly shews, that these gifts of the spirit were *real* communications from God, *known* to be such by the most *prejudiced Jews*, and such substantial gifts too, as were sufficient to remove their most inveterate prejudices and objections, and reconcile them to the admission of the *Gentiles* to equal privileges with themselves, and force them to own them to be as truly the people of God as they were.

One cannot help also observing, what a *spirit of prudence* there was, that visibly appeared in the first propagation of the gospel. The Apostles themselves could not foresee this difficulty about the admission of the Gentiles into the church of Christ ; for they, as well as the other Jews, had an high opinion of circumcision, and thought that none could be received as the disciples of Christ without it, and conforming to the whole ceremonial of the Mosaick law. And the consequence of this must have been, their preaching the gospel only to the Jews, or binding the observance of the whole law on

† Acts xi. 18.

the believing Gentiles, to the unspeakable prejudice of Christianity. But as the Gentiles were to be converted, the difficulty was upon what terms. The grant of the spirit was a full determination in this point. What was this also an *invention* of these *illiterate Galileans*? This a contrivance of theirs to renew the prejudices of the bigotted Jews? If these gifts of the spirit were *imaginary* and *delusive*, the *Jews* would have treated *them* with *contempt*, and the *Apostles* as *impostors*, for pretending to confer gifts which they could not; and instead of being converted to Christ themselves, and allowing the Gentiles to become sharers in the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, without a conformity to their law, must have been more strongly prejudiced against Christianity, and have entertained a more inveterate hatred of it, for its being a *levelling* scheme, and putting the Gentiles upon an equal foot of privileges, as the people of God, with themselves. But if these gifts of the spirit were *real* communications from God, then the disposal of them was intirely in God's hands, and could only be communicated as he pleased; and the vouchsafing them to the Gentiles upon their faith, was a provision, not of *human prudence*, but of *divine wisdom*, to obviate the strongest objection against the spread of the gospel, and to make way for the *Gentiles* to become *fellow citizens with the Saints*, and to be acknowledged as an essential part of the household of God.

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There are other considerations of importance belonging to this subject ; but I can now only observe, how greatly the *wisdom of God* appears, in the *different* purposes effected by the *confusion of languages*, after the flood, and the *gift of languages* at this feast of Pentecost. That was a *judgment* upon mankind for their *wickedness* ; this was a *singular blessing to the world*. That consisted in their being made partly to forget and lose their native tongue, and to speak in dialects and languages unintelligible to each other. This consisted in an ability to speak in various dialects and languages, that they might declare intelligibly the wonderful works of God to all nations and people. The effect of that was the separation and *dispersion* of mankind ; this was to *gather together the children of God that were scattered abroad* †. The *accidental* consequence of that was, the *gradual loss* of the true religion ; the *immediate intended consequence* of this was, the *conveyance* of the knowledge of *true religion*, and the *speedier propagation* of it to the uttermost ends of the earth. And as that confusion of languages was *immediately from God*, it adds greatly to the *credibility* of this miraculous event of the *gift of languages* ; since neither could be effected but by the power of God, and that power is alike equal to both. And though the *gift of languages* was one *principal effect* of this original pouring forth of the spirit of

\* John xi. 52.



God, yet as the Apostles received it as the *spirit of truth and grace*, so we besides the *confirmation* of our faith as Christians, derived from these miraculous effects of it on the Apostles and others, may obtain it ourselves for all the purposes of *knowledge, sanctification, and comfort*, if we humbly and sincerely ask it of God. And if the *fruits of the spirit* appear in us, in all the dispositions of a real piety, and the various instances of an exemplary, regular, habitual virtue, it will be to us a *sure evidence* of our being the *children of God*, and the comfortable earnest of the *purchased promised possession*. As therefore your faith, as Christians, stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power, live as becomes those who are under his sacred influence; for if through the spirit ye mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the children of God.

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## S E R M O N    X I V .

The Proof of Christianity from the  
Descent of the Holy Spirit.

ACTS ii. 1, 2, 3, 4.

*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance.*

**I**N the preceding discourse on this wonderful descent of the divine spirit on the Apostles, in his miraculous powers and gifts, I

I. Considered the *nature* of the *fact* itself; and

II. Some *peculiar circumstances* attending it. I enlarged on several which demonstrate the hand of God in this great event, and the strength of the arguments hence drawn for the

382 *The Proof of Christianity from* Sermon 14:  
the divine authority of the Christian religion.  
To the circumstances then mentioned, I would  
now add two more.

9. The *avowed intention* to be answered, and the *immediate consequence* drawn from *this claim* of the extraordinary gifts of the spirit of God, by the *Apostles*, is another circumstance too remarkable to be omitted; and this was to *support a cause*, which almost the whole nation hated, and by engaging in which they well knew they should expose themselves to the resentment and anger of the priests and governors, and their own lives to the most imminent hazard of destruction. 'Twas not *two months* before that *Jesus* had been *crucified*, at the instigation of the priests, elders, scribes and council, as an impostor and deceiver of the people, for declaring himself to be *the Christ, the Son of the Blessed \**, after they had treated him with the utmost indignity, and added the insolence of scorn to hatred and cruelty. By destroying him, they imagined they had put an end to all pretensions of his Messiahship; and though the report of his resurrection at first alarmed them; yet as his *Apostles* as yet had not appeared in publick, given no solemn testimony to the fact, and don't seem to have taken any open steps in vindication of their master's character, and to establish the belief of his restoration to life; 'tis probable the Jewish priests and rulers imagined that the whole affair would drop,

• Mark xiv. 62.

and that they should have no farther trouble from Jesus and his followers. And had the twelve Apostles made this pretence to a *prophetic* spirit, and under the supposed influence of it publickly declared their dead *Master* to be an *impostor*, and warned the Jews not to believe or regard him as the Messiah ; as this *change of parties* would have been nothing more than what the most admired characters amongst the ancients are chargeable with, so it would have secured them the *favour* and *friendship* of their own *governors* and *people*, who were now in a sort of interest bound to defend what they had done, through malice and envy, in destroying him. But how did the Apostles act upon receiving this extraordinary gift of tongues ? They declared it to be the effusion of the spirit, or what they received by immediate inspiration from this spirit of God ; and as under this inspiration, they instantly preach before the Jews, collected together from all nations, *that Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God amongst them, by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of them ; they appeal to them that were present to hear them, that they themselves knew all this ; they charge them publickly with having crucified him by ungodly hands, i. e. with having wickedly murdered him ; they declare him raised up by God, and themselves the witnesses of it, that God had exalted him to his right hand, granted him power to confer the holy spirit, and that what they saw in, and then heard from the Apostles,*  
was



was nothing less than the very spirit of God shed abroad upon themselves; concluding all with this solemn declaration: *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Messiah* \*. So that the Apostles not only solemnly declare themselves the witnesses of *Christ's resurrection*, but witnesses commissioned by God to declare it, and to publish to the whole nation that he was their *Messiah and King*, and that there was no other method of salvation but by repentance and faith in him. This new appearance of things made the case of Jesus a very serious and important affair: As now it was asserted, that God himself by his spirit became the witness of his resurrection and exaltation, as the whole nation became publickly charged with this murder, and as they are appealed to as evidences for his extraordinary and miraculous works whilst living. Now here are two things that deserve consideration;

The one is, that the *Apostles* themselves must have been the *weakest*, as well as the *worst* of men, to make appeals of this nature to the whole body of the nation, if they had not been certain of the *facts* they appealed to them for, and absolutely sure that none could or durst confront them. The things themselves referred to were *recent*, in every one's memory. The whole city of *Jerusalem* and country of *Judea* could have given the lie to

\* Acts ii. 36.

the *appeal* made to them concerning the miracles of Jesus, for he lived and acted amongst the very men the Apostles spoke to, had they not known them to be true; and such an appeal must have instantly turned to their own confusion; and this the Apostles could not be ignorant of, and therefore could not have acted in this manner, without intending effectually, and for ever to destroy their own and their master's character, had they not been sure that Jesus was the man they affirmed him to be, and his miracles so notorious, as to have the whole nation vouchers for the reality of them. Had the contrary been evident, and the persons to whom the Apostles appealed been wholly ignorant of the miracles and wonders that Jesus did, or believed them to be nothing but the tricks and deceptions of an impostor; their pretending to the effusion of the spirit of God, and introducing him as a witness of Christ's resurrection, must have been extremely prejudicial to their cause, and they would have been justly charged with adding *impiety* to impudence, and with affronting God himself in the most insolent and wicked manner, by introducing him as a voucher for facts, which the whole nation knew nothing of, or knew to be wholly groundless and false; and they could have expected nothing less, but that the persons present would have *stoned* them as *impostors* for such a daring affront offered both to God and man. Besides, their charging in so peremp-

tory a manner the whole nation, both governors and people, with cruelty and injustice, and the murder of an innocent person, an approved prophet, and their own Messiah, was such an affront to all of them, such a publick arraignment of the justice of the nation, and carried such an horrid imputation upon the priests, the several sects, the scribes, the grand council, the whole body of the people, as that the Apostles must know would issue in their own destruction, had they not been *sure* of a testimony in their favour in the consciences of all men, that God would protect them in their bearing witness to the truth, and support them in declaring the innocence, the miracles, the Messiahship, the exaltation and glory of Christ Jesus, whom they now proclaimed as Lord and Christ, and the reception of whom as such they declared necessary to salvation. And therefore I would further observe,

That the *Priests, Scribes, Pharisees and Council* of the nation were *obliged, in vindication of themselves*, the honour of their character, the innocence of the nation, the justice of their procedure, and to prevent the spread of the doctrine of Christ, and preserve the people from being deceived by, and believing in one, whom they had crucified as an impostor, to have *published some authentic account* of his character and conduct, of his frauds and deceits, of his trial and the reason of his condemnation, of the depositions of the witnesses

nesses against him, of their character and veracity, of the fairness and equity of the whole procedure against him, for their own justification, and the satisfaction of the people, in opposition to the heinous charge of their being the *wicked destroyers and murderers of the Son of God*. They ought, I say, to have done this, as it was now in their power, as the witnesses were living, as the facts were recent, and they had every advantage in their hands to convict the Apostles of falshood, and of traducing the honour and justice of the nation in prosecuting him, and the Roman Governor in condemning him. They ought also to have made a *strict inquiry*, and impartial examination into this account of the *miraculous effusion of the spirit of God* upon these *Apostles*, of the languages they spoke, of the witnesses that heard them, and of the doctrine they taught, and if they had found the genuine marks of imposture and fraud, to have made the proper discovery of it, and disabused their people; and could they have fairly proved the imposture of Jesus and his Apostles, that his condemnation and execution were just and deserved, and that the Apostles had abused and slandered the government of the nation, and the justice of the people; the whole world would have justified their conduct in the severest treatment of the Apostles themselves, and in the most exemplary punishment they could have inflicted on them; and in consequence of this an effectual stop must have been immediately put to the pro-



gress of Christ's doctrine, and he must have been *numbered* not only *with sinners in his death*, but amongst those *impostors* who deserved to fall a sacrifice to public justice. But that the Jewish nation or government took any such step as this, is *not* so much as *pretended* by the *Jews* themselves; and had they done this 'tis impossible it could have been suppressed, as there were *forty years* from these events to the *destruction of Jerusalem*, during which they could have sent such an authentick account to the whole body of the people; and as there were at this very season Jews at Jerusalem, who had resorted thither from all nations of the earth, and who when returned to the several countries where they lived, could have given the true information to all their brethren, and effectually have prevented any harvest of converts to Jesus Christ. But as facts are obstinate things, and truth invincible in its nature, as the *council of God shall stand*, and all attempts to frustrate the designs of his providence shall be themselves finally frustrated; the Jewish nation and government were not able to contradict the miraculous wonders of the life of Christ, to vindicate their own justice in destroying him, to convict the Apostles of imposture, or to prevent the success of his gospel, and the daily encrease of his disciples and faithful followers. And therefore I would add

10. Once more, that the *effect* immediately consequent upon this extraordinary appearance, is truly *surprising*, and can in no

rational way be accounted for, but upon the supposition of the *reality* and *certainty* of the Apostles receiving this miraculous gift from the spirit of God. The historian observes, that upon *Peter's* ending his discourse, the persons present who heard him *were pricked in their hearts* †, struck with such a grief; as though their hearts had been struck through, and pierced with a sharp-pointed instrument; and they said to *Peter and the rest of the Apostles*: *Men and Brethren, what shall we do?* The meaning of this question can only be: If Jesus was approved of by God by the miracles he wrought, if he was unjustly apprehended, and wickedly crucified, if God hath raised him from the dead, exalted him to his right hand, hath given him the spirit, declared him to be Lord and Messiah, and if you as his witnesses speak under the inspiration of that spirit which he hath poured on you; what must we do to save ourselves from the guilt of destroying him, and from that vengeance which we have reason to fear from God to our own destruction? The question evidently carries conviction and concern, sense of guilt, and fear of divine displeasure; it plainly shews, that they saw something extraordinary and divine attending the Apostles, that they could neither deny the things they asserted, the languages in which they spoke them, nor the inspiration of the Spirit of God to which they ascribed them. But what was

† Ver. 37.

the *Apostles answer* to this question? Such a one as must comfort and surprize them. First, *repent*, viz. of all your sins, and in particular of the share you have had in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; in consequence of this *be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*; shew the truth of this your repentance by believing in and receiving him as the Messiah, and publicly declaring by your being baptised in his name, that you expect the remission of your sins through him; and as the evidence that God hath forgiven and accepted you, *you also shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*. The immediate effect was, that they willingly receiving his word, believing his doctrine, and submitting to his exhortation, *were baptised*; insomuch that this *very day there were added to them about three thousand souls*, who became avowed and professed disciples of Christ.

Now what was it that convinced and converted so large a number to embrace Christianity? They had the strongest prejudices in the world to prevent it, and they could have no possible reason to induce them to it, but the *consciousness* that what the Apostles had asserted concerning Christ was *truth*, and that this gift of languages to them was really and immediately vouchsafed them from the spirit of God. Could they have confronted the Apostles, and honestly declared that they knew nothing of the miracles of Christ, that they believed him justly put to death, that their pretence to speak new languages was an

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imposture, and their claim to speak them by inspiration an impiety ; in a word, had there been any thing suspicious in the character of Jesus, whom the Apostles solemnly declared to be the Messiah, it must have now come out, and been made publick, and neither the *power or art of man*, much less of *twelve such men* as the Apostles, who had the countenance neither of the magistracy nor priesthood, nor of the sects, nor the people, to defend and support them ; I say, neither the power nor art of men could have prevented the publishing of every circumstance that could have affected the character and reputation of Jesus ; or had there been any thing like collusion or fraud in this gift of languages to which the Apostles now pretended, it could not have been concealed from such a promiscuous multitude met together on this occasion, without any previous warning, or fixed design and prejudice in favour of the persons who where said to speak them ; and the effect of both must have been, *not a conversion* to the belief of the doctrines the Apostles preached, or to their being the messengers of God, or to the crucified Jesus being the Messiah, but a conversion to an inveterate and incurable *hatred of the Apostles*, as enemies of their country, and disturbers of the publick peace. But on the contrary, *three thousand* are actually converted to the Christian faith, by a *fact which they saw*, and to which they were witnesses ; by an amazing miracle, private and unlearned men, speaking languages they never under-



stood before, speaking them in the hearing of those, to whom the languages were native, who heard, who confessed, who stood amazed at the thing, and were so fully convinced and so absolutely certain of it, as to embrace that religion which they thus heard miraculously taught, each in the language in which he was born. So that here is the most authentick testimony of *three thousand* persons, who were *eye and ear witnesses* to this extraordinary gift of languages to the Apostles, to enable them to testify to the whole nation of the Jews, the innocence, the resurrection, the Messiahship, and glory of Christ. So that as no fact can be more amply attested than this, so whilst it remains firm and established, Christianity will stand upon an immovable foundation, that no art or power will be able to subvert. But this leads me in a few words to consider,

III. In the last general, the *proof* that this extraordinary grant of the spirit of God carries in it, for the *truth of the Christian religion and doctrine*, and in particular of the *resurrection and glory of our blessed Saviour*, and to shew the *Apostles* were authorised witnesses of both. And here,

I. It was the accomplishment of an *antient prophecy*, that had been many ages before delivered by one, under the inspiration of God. Thus St. Peter himself tells the Jews, in answer to the reproachful charge of drunkenness, that some would have fastened on them. *This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

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*It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, and on my servants and on my hand-maidens will I in those days pour out of my spirit, and they shall prophecy. And I will shew wonders in Heaven above, and signs in the Earth beneath, blood and fire and vapour of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.*

This prophecy expressly predicts, that there was some very great, illustrious and terrible day of the Lord, or season appointed by God, that should certainly take place; and that the approach of it should be known by these two circumstances: the one, a more liberal and general effusion of the prophetick spirit of God, upon persons of every condition and degree; the other, the strongest convulsions in the Jewish state and republick, the burning of their cities, and the destruction of their inhabitants, and that entire confusion and subversion of the whole nation, which in the stile of the eastern writers is denoted by the *sun's being turned into darkness and the moon into blood*; though the expressions are taken from nature and fact; the very air being rendered so very opaque by the smoke of the burning cities, as sometimes to obscure the sun, and at other times to present the aspect of the moon red as blood. *The great and terrible day of the Lord was to succeed these events, i. e. the intire destruction*

struction of Jerusalem, and the absolute subversion of the Jewish state and nation. As all histories relating to the Jews confirm the prophetick account of these publick calamities and confusions that befell this unhappy nation; so this effusion of the spirit of God, of which the Apostles received the first fruits, and which they conferred on others who believed, was an abundant confirmation of the prophecy relating to the pouring out of the spirit, and demonstrated that the persons who received it, and conferred it upon others, taught under the inspiration of the spirit of God, and deserved to be received and submitted to as messengers sent to teach men the way of salvation. But,

2. *The gift of the spirit to the Apostles, was frequently by our blessed Lord expressly promised to these, before his sufferings and after his resurrection, and they were commanded to go to and not stir from Jerusalem, but there wait for the promise, i. e. for the accomplishment of it, and assured that within a few days it should be made good, and that after this gift was come on them, they should be his witnesses to the whole nation of the Jews, unto the uttermost parts of the earth.* This gift therefore became necessary, to secure the truth and veracity of Christ, and the accomplishment of his promise, which they were in constant expectation of; and it was as necessary for the instruction of the world and propagation of Christ's gospel; the Apostles not understanding the nature of the gospel,  
not

nor knowing what to preach, nor what to testify, till they had received the spirit *that was to lead them into all truth*; or if they had known this, being utterly *incapable* by their *ignorance of languages*, to have published the gospel any where but in Galilee, and amongst those of their own country and dialect. And therefore the Apostles receiving this gift, when their master was actually taken from them, exactly according to his promise, was a full declaration that he was then alive, that he had these extraordinary gifts to confer, and that by conferring them on the Apostles, he owned them as such, pointed them out as his witnesses to the world, and gave the most authentick testimony to the truth of what they taught relating to him, and the method of salvation by repentance and faith in him. But,

3. The *nature of the gift* itself was such, as cannot be referred to any other *original but God*, and therefore whatever doctrine it was given to confirm, it was in reality, and therefore ought to be regarded as the *seal*, immediately set by God himself to the truth of it. That God hath by the *immensity* of his *presence*, and the *spirituality* of his *nature*, a constant immediate *access* to the minds of men, and is in fact perpetually intimately present with them, is a truth of *natural* religion, and is involved in the very idea of God. That God's knowledge is *universal*, extending to men's hearts and thoughts, and the various words



words in all languages in which they cloath them, is also certain and demonstrable. That God can *illuminate the mind* with the knowledge of things and words, clearly without error, and instantly without labour or process, is at least *as certain* as that *men can inform one another*, gradually, as far as their own knowledge reaches; because whatever capacities there are in *created* beings must be in an infinitely more perfect manner in the *eternal and all glorious* one; and I suppose it will appear absurd to every one to assert, that he who opened the eye cannot furnish it with objects of sight, or that he who formed the intellectual capacities cannot convey every kind of knowledge, to which those capacities naturally extend; or that he cannot suggest to the mind those terms and words, by immediate impressions from himself, so as to render persons able to converse with others intelligibly and pertinently, which men are able to suggest to and impress upon their own minds, by application and study, so as to retain the remembrance of them throughout the whole of life. 'Tis true, the *instantaneous* acquisition of languages is beyond the reach of *human power*, and much more so, the *instantaneous communication* of the knowledge of them to *others*. In both cases, 'tis contrary to the laws of nature, *i. e.* to those laws of nature that *limit the capacities of men*, and within which their sphere of action lies. But the laws of nature *differ*, as the *powers* and capacities of intel-

intellectual being *rise higher*, and what is impossible by the law of our nature to us, is easy to be done by beings of superior rank, and intirely within those laws of nature to which they are subjected. And as all the laws of created beings are nothing but the *constitution of the wisdom and power of God*, 'tis evident he is not circumscribed or *limited* by them, nor indeed limited by any thing but by the *possibility* of things, and the dictates of his own *infinite wisdom and goodness*. And therefore, though we cannot suppose that God can communicate to men any kind of knowledge for which they are formed absolutely incapable, without enlarging their capacities, or giving them new ones ; yet, as in the present case, the knowledge of languages, and of the gospel doctrine, and other things communicated to the Apostles by this extraordinary gift of the holy spirit, is *not beyond the natural powers* of men ; such a communication is not naturally impossible, and therefore not beyond the power of God to communicate ; and the miracle consists, not in making the Apostles know what they were naturally incapable of knowing, but in the manner of their information, the agency by which they received it, and the instantaneous manner in which it was conveyed to them.

This was so extraordinary, and seems to be so entirely above the reach of every being, but him who is all wise and all powerful, is so peculiar and unprecedented, and so entirely depends

depends upon such an immediate access to the minds of men, such a command of their intellectual powers, and ability to influence and direct them at pleasure, as evidently bespeaks a *divine agency*, and can with reason be attributed to no agent inferior to God himself. Especially if we consider, what was communicated at the same time with this gift of languages; viz. such a *full and compleat knowledge* of the whole *scheme of redemption by Christ*, contrary to all their former inveterate prejudices, as implied an intire alteration of their sentiments, and rendered them capable of becoming the instructors of all mankind, in a *scheme of religion*, to which they were before almost intirely strangers; a *scheme of religion* that must intirely depend on the constitution and will of God, and of which therefore the knowledge could not in the nature of the thing be otherwise had, than by immediate revelation from him. Now the argument from hence is: That as this extraordinary conveyance of the knowledge of languages to the Apostles was by immediate inspiration from himself, and to enable them to preach the gospel of Christ, to their brethren, collected together at *Jerusalem* at that time, from all nations of the world, that gospel must necessarily be the *doctrine of God*, and the great things they taught under that inspiration must be *real truths*, and such as it was his pleasure mankind should be instructed in, in order to their believing them, and living agreeable to the

the proper tendency and influence of them; because 'tis absolutely impossible, and inconsistent with the character, the rectitude, wisdom, goodness, and all the ends of the moral government of God, that he should by miracle inspire men with the knowledge of languages, to furnish men with the capacity to teach a falsehood, to lead men into an error, and to lay such a powerful deception before them, as must necessarily influence the most impartial, unprejudiced, and upright persons to submit to the power of it. I think we may say, that no person, who knew the Apostles, their manner of life and education, and heard them to his full conviction, instantaneously speaking in new languages, which they never understood before, and in those languages preaching Jesus, and the doctrine of salvation by him alone, could possibly doubt whether they were under a divine influence, or whether the doctrine they preached was agreeable to the will of God. Especially when 'tis considered, that the whole *Jewish* nation was then in a suspense about the character and mission of Jesus Christ; whom all knew to have been a very extraordinary person, and to have performed many unquestionable miracles, and who had nevertheless been crucified by the rulers of the people, and was notwithstanding declared by his followers to be risen from the dead. In the midst of these perplexities and doubts, to see his Apostles instantly speaking with new languages, and in these boldly declaring to the whole nation, gathered from  
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the distant parts of the earth, Jesus the Son of God, and salvation by him; this could be regarded as nothing short of the determination and decision of God himself, putting an end to the controversy, by a publick vindication of the innocency of Christ, and declaring him to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased.

The great things which the Apostles immediately preached under this inspiration were:

That Jesus was a man approved of God.—

That his crucifiers were wicked and ungodly men.—

That he was deliver'd by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God.—

That God rais'd him up from the dead.—

That he was exalted by the right hand of God.—

That he had received from the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost.—

That he shed it forth on his Apostles.—

That all his foes should be made his footstool.—

That he is constituted Lord and Messiah.—

And that repentance and baptism in his name for the remission of sins, shall secure men forgiveness, and entitle them to the grant of the spirit of God. These are the doctrines confirmed by the testimony of the spirit of God; and whosoever believes these things, and acts agreeable to the natural influence and tendency of this faith, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. And upon the whole, if we consider this matter impartially, as it stands

stands connected with other parts of the gospel scheme, there will appear such a connection and coincidency of facts and miracles, to support the character of Christ, as must force us to allow, either that the writers of the gospel history and other sacred books, were men of the most exquisite invention, the most consummate wisdom and prudence, and of the greatest knowledge of men and things, that ever appeared in the world, and who never had their equals, thus to contrive a story, composed of the credible, the true, the marvellous and miraculous; all mixed together with so much nature, and yet with so much art, as to constitute one uniform, consistent scheme of religion and morals, so as that there is no inconsistency of principles and facts, no unnecessary miracles introduced, every miracle asserted necessary to give the scheme the air of divinity, and an original from God, and each miracle such for nature, and such for season and time, as that one cannot imagine, that if God had been the real author of the scheme he would have wrought any other miracles in favour of it, or in any other circumstance or season, than what the gospel history represents them. Or else we must suppose that these twelve fishermen, who were the *Apostles of Christ*, though *without education, learning, converse with, or knowledge of mankind*, any acquired abilities, or any *superior endowments of nature*, were yet *more accomplished and able law-givers* than *Moses, Lycurgus, Solon*, and other boasted names of antiquity,

and more excellent philosophers than Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and others the most celebrated authors that can be named; and that they either knew infinitely more both of religion and morality than those law-givers and philosophers did, though destitute of all their advantages for knowledge; or that they were infinitely *honester* and *better* men, if in wisdom they were equals, by boldly publishing their sentiments to the world, and not concealing them, as the others did, in compliance to the prejudices of the people, and the prevailing corruptions of mankind, amongst whom they lived. And that in this point of policy and prudence they excelled all the ancient law-givers of the heathen world, who made such pretensions to converse with, and communications from gods and goddesses, and certain miraculous works wrought by their power, as that every man of sense, believer or unbeliever, many of the antient Gentiles and Philosophers themselves, Jews and Turks, and Christians, all discern the imposture of, and laugh at as contemptible and ridiculous; whereas these poor illiterate uneducated fishermen and publicans, delivered such a scheme of principles and morals, as will stand the test of the most critical examination, and appear of that importance as to be worthy of the confirmation of God, and pretended to confirm them by *such miracles* as have no appearance of impropriety, are in their nature *fit* to be ascribed to the agency of God, and as were exactly *suited* to the nature of the doctrine

to be confirmed by them; and have given such a kind of *evidence* of the reality of them, as hath *convinced* the most *thoughtful, inquisitive, and learned* men, *kings, princes, philosophers,* natural and moral, the greatest the world ever produced, as gain the utmost credit to *this day* amongst the *wisest* and *best* of men, which have all the *natural appearances* of truth and credibility in them, which many of the *enemies* of their persons and doctrine, in the ages nearest them allowed to be *real*, and accounted for by the most unlikely and improbable causes, and which none of their ancient or modern adversaries can destroy, without destroying the grounds of probability, the faith of history, and denying the most essential attributes and perfections of God himself. Or if this *superior sagacity* and skill, this I had almost said miraculous knowledge of men and things, will be *denied* to these *Apostles of Christ*, as I am sure I see no manner of reason to allow them, I see but *one other conclusion*, that 'tis possible in the nature of things to draw from all this, and that is: *Their doctrine was divine, Jesus* their master was *Lord and Christ*, and the *Author* of *his* and *their* miracles and gifts was no other than *God himself*. Methinks I feel the ground upon which I stand as a Christian, and can't help rejoicing to find the foundation of my hope and faith as firm and durable as the power, wisdom and goodness of God. And from what hath been said I may infer



1. The propriety and consistency of the Christian doctrine, and the nature of the miracles wrought in confirmation of it. Consider

That the doctrine of Christ was that of grace and mercy—

All his miracles, miracles of goodness.

His crucifixion obscured his name and glory,

His resurrection restor'd and established it.

The prophecies declared him King and Lord—

The gospel advanced him to the right hand of God.

His death was the greatest wickedness and impiety—

The sun withdrew his beams as ashamed of the horrid fact,

And the earth trembled at the crime of his murderers.

The resurrection to life was a capital part of his religion—

He rose himself to prove it, and many of the Saints rose with him,

The earnest and pledge of the future resurrection of the whole number.

The publishers of his doctrine were prejudiced ignorant—

They therefore received the spirit of all truth to inform them.

The gospel was to be published to all nations—

And therefore the publishers received the gift of languages.

It was to be soon and speedily published—

And

And therefore this gift was vouchsafed when persons of all languages were present to receive the divinely communicated instruction.

The preachers of it were to be exposed to all persecutions—

And therefore received assurances that God would prosper them.

The uncircumcised Gentiles were to be received into Christ's church—

And therefore were to be sanctified and separated by the spirit of God himself.

Who can help discerning the amazing propriety and coincidence of things, or acknowledging the hand and wisdom of God?

2. How *substantial* a confirmation is this of our Christian faith, and how *rational* the grounds of our belief in Jesus. We are not credulous in our reception of the gospel doctrine. We embrace no absurdity of opinion. We believe no impossibilities. We give credit to no *incredible* miracles, nor to any *unnecessary* ones. The *connection* between the doctrine and the miraculous confirmation of it is *natural*. No miracles are boasted of in Christianity that have an air of futility and meanness, of romance and imposture, and miracles are never introduced but when the *Nodus* is *Deo vindice dignus*, when the case required it, and demanded the interposal. The facts we build on have every appearance of certainty, every ground of probability, and are supported by evidence and effects, that constrain our belief, and that after a thousand attempts have never

been disproved, and can be no otherwise declared impossible but by blaspheming God, and denying him to be the almighty creator and preserver of all things. And 'till these capital facts of Christ's resurrection, and the miraculous vouchsafement of the gift of languages can be disproved, our belief as Christians will be rational in itself, and the effects of that belief when real, such as will prepare us for and render us secure of salvation.

3. We may hence learn the *true meaning* of what St. Paul asserts, that *his preaching was not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power, and that our faith in Christ stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

4. We may see the *reason* why God chose *such instruments* for the publication of the gospel, private, illiterate, unlearned, prejudiced men, *viz.* that the cause they supported might appear not an *human* one, but a *divine* one, and that the *propagation* and *success* of it might be acknowledged to be owing to his *peculiar protection* and *favour*.

5. We may learn what are the *great essential doctrines* of the Gospel, to be continually taught by the ministers of the gospel; such unquestionably as were taught by the Apostles themselves, under the immediate inspiration of the spirit of truth, which directed the Apostles into all truth, when they first published the gospel to the world, and laid the foundations of the Christian church. And

6. Lastly

6. Lastly, we have reason to be thankful that the *spirit of God*, in the Christian church, is a *constant permanent blessing*, and that though we have no reason to think we shall receive it in the more shewy, splendid and miraculous gifts, that were bestowed on the first converts to Christianity, yet that we may receive it in those which are now more beneficial to us, as a *spirit of truth, faith, grace and holiness*, to fit us for every good word and work, and to prepare us for final and eternal salvation. Let us pray for this invaluable gift of the spirit of God, assuring ourselves of this, *that if the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in us; he who raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken our mortal bodies by his spirit that dwelleth in us.*



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## S E R M O N    X V .

The Doctrine of a Resurrection explained.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 35.

*But some man will say ; How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come ?*

**A**ND this is a very important enquiry, and if made with a *becoming disposition* of mind, and an honest desire after satisfaction in a question of so great importance, deserved a very serious, candid, and friendly answer. By St. Paul's reply : *Thou fool*, the inquirer seems to have been of a very *different temper*, and to have asked these questions out of *contempt* and *ridicule* of the doctrine of the resurrection ; imagining that by asking, *How are the dead raised, and with what body do they come ?* he should have *puzzled* the Apostle ; and either have forced him to acknowledge the questions were too hard for him to resolve, or drawn from him such an *answer*, as would have been *absurd*, and rendered the doctrine itself utterly *incredible*. In this view, the censure, *Thou fool*, was not more severe, than the impertinence and scorn of the objector deserved.

deserved. There were some, as the Apostle informs us, amongst the *Corinthians* themselves, who said, *there was no resurrection of the dead* \*. Some ran into the error of affirming, *that the resurrection was already past* †, explaining it of a spiritual kind of resurrection, such as the Apostle makes mention of, when he tells the *Ephesians*: *When we were dead in sins, he hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus* ‡; and the *Colossians*: *Buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead* §; asserting that the resurrection consisted intirely in the conversion of the Gentiles, by the preaching of the gospel, to the faith of Christ, by the ministry of the Apostles. Others represented the doctrine of the resurrection, as utterly *impossible*, as incapable of being effected by the power of God; as St. Paul intimates before *Agrippa*, when he asks: *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead* ||? Even some of those, who professed Christianity, had this opinion of the resurrection, and utterly denied the possibility of it. Others, who did not deny the possibility of the thing, yet represented it as an *undesirable* one, and the doctrine that taught it as *mean, abominable and detestable*. Thus *Celsus*, the *Epicurean*, speaks of it with abhorrence \*\*: “They, *i. e.* the

\* Ver. 12. † 2 Tim. ii. 18. ‡ Ephes. ii. 5, 6. § Colos. ii. 12.  
|| Acts xxvi. 8. \*\* Orig. Contr. Cels. p. 587, 583.

Christians, hold this foolish opinion, that after God hath set the world on fire, and utterly roasted and consumed every thing in it, they only are the persons who shall escape out of these ruins; and not only those who shall then be living, but they also who have been a long while dead, and that they shall rise out of the ground cloathed with the same flesh."

"And this, let me speak, says he, the plain truth, is worthy of the worms; for what human soul can ever desire to return into a putrified body?" Even *amongst themselves*, he adds, there are some, who are so far from approving this doctrine, that they censure it as a *soul, abominable and impossible* one. For what body, being intirely corrupted, can return into its original condition, and its primitive constitution, when it hath been once dissolved? And when they have no other answer, says he, to make to this difficulty, they betake themselves to this absurd defence, that every thing is possible to God. But God cannot do vile or base things, neither will he do any thing contrary to nature. No, if you desire any thing that is abominable, to gratify your own wicked disposition, God cannot for this reason do it, nor is it therefore to be believed that it shall actually come to pass. For God as governor of the world is not the author of extravagant desires, or mad disorders; but of what is right, just and natural. I allow that he can give the soul eternal life; but dead bodies are viler than dung, and God neither will nor can render the flesh, which is  
full

full of what cannot be mentioned with decency, immortal, contrary to nature. For he is the reason of all things that are, and therefore can do nothing contrary to reason or himself. In this manner *Celsus* argued against the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, representing it as so vile, irrational and contemptible a thing, as was *unworthy of God* to effect, and therefore that he neither would nor could be the author of it.

There were *others* of the enemies of Christianity, in the primitive times, who argued against the *possibility* of the resurrection from *other topicks* †; “alleging, that the bodies of men were often devoured by fish and beasts, and these fish and beasts were afterwards eaten by men; that sometimes men were devoured by men, children eaten by their parents, through excess of hunger, captives devoured by those who took them prisoners, through excess of rage; so that the bodies of some were actually become parts of the bodies of others; and therefore the resurrection of the body was a thing absolutely impossible, because as the resurrection supposes that every man's body shall be restored to him, this cannot be in the instances mentioned, in which the *same body* becomes the body of *several* persons, and which therefore can never be restored to any one particular person whatsoever; inasmuch as if they are restored to any one, the bodies of the rest must be necessarily

† *Athemag. de Mort. Resur. p. 153—155.*



412 *Doctrine of a Resurrection explained.* Sermon. 15.  
maimed and imperfect." These difficulties  
have been urged also by *modern unbelievers*,  
and triumphed in as insuperable objections  
against the truth of the resurrection of the  
dead; and 'tis therefore no wonder that they  
should treat it with scorn, as we find the an-  
cient enemies of Christianity did, who when  
they heard St. Paul preaching the resurrection  
of the dead at *Athens* ||, *mocked* at the doctrine,  
as an absurd and impossible one.

Even many of the *wisest*, and *best philoso-  
phers* amongst the *heathens* must necessarily be  
*prejudiced* against the doctrine of the resurrec-  
tion, upon the first mention of it, by the sen-  
timents they had formed both of the *bodies*  
and *minds* of men. The *body* they treated  
with the utmost *contempt*, as scarce any part  
of, and being of little or no consequence to  
the real man; sometimes giving it the most  
reproachful names, and looking on it with a  
kind of abhorrence, as nothing better than a  
bag of corruption and rottenness; and when  
they spoke most favourably of it, calling it  
only a vessel, a tabernacle, an inn to sojourn \*,  
and not a proper house to dwell in †. Yea,  
they looked on the body as the *prison* of the  
soul, in which it was confined and fettered,  
degraded and polluted, and that in the state  
to which it went after its dismissal from the  
body, it was intirely and forever separated from  
it, and entered into a much more beautiful

|| Acts xvii. 32. \* Clausæ tenebris et carcere cæco. Virg.  
Æn. 6. v. 734. † Cicero de Senect. c. xxiii. Soman. Scip.  
p. 609.

habitation or dwelling †, which *Socrates* professed to be his hope, just before his drinking the fatal poison §. Agreeable to this is what *Xenophon* relates as part of the last speech of *Cyrus*, representing, I imagine, *Xenophon's* own sentiments, and those of some of the Philosophers, his contemporaries. Speaking to his children, *Cyrus* says †: “ I could never, my Sons, persuade myself, that the soul, whilst in this mortal body, can be said to live, or that it dies when separated from it; for I perceive that 'tis the soul which animates the body during its continuance therein; and therefore the soul cannot lose its perception or wisdom, when separated from the unconscious stupid body; but that then the soul grows properly wise, and understands; when released from the body it becomes an unmixed and pure spirit.” In like manner the *Roman Orator* speaks his own sentiments under the person of his friend *Lælius* ||. “ I could never, says he, agree with those who have lately argued on this subject, that our souls perish with our bodies, and that every thing is destroyed by death—but I am of his opinion, whom the oracle pronounced the wisest man, who constantly affirmed, that the minds of men were divine, and that those of wise and good men, upon their leaving the body, im-

† Αὐτὸ τὸ οὐρανὸν ζῶσι τοὶ παρὰ τὴν ἐκ τῶν ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ, καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ ἀφικνύνται. *Plat. Phæd.* p. 119. c.

§ *Cicer. de Senect.* c. xxi. p. 447, 448. et de *Amicit.* c. iv. p. 457. † *Xenoph. Cyrop.* p. 655. Edit. Hutchinson, *Cicer. de Senect.* c. xxii. p. 449, 450. || *De Amicitia*, c. iv.

mediately

mediately returned to Heaven;" as he afterwards expresses it: Every good man's mind easily flies by death as from the prison and bonds of the body, and bends its course towards the Gods;" And therefore he says \*, "they truly live, who have escaped from the chains of the body, as from their prison †; but as to what you call life, it is in reality death." Many more passages were easy to be added to shew you, that the *ancient wise men* in the heathen world considered the *soul* as capable of existing in the *most perfect manner*, when wholly dismissed from the body, and when entirely escaped from the prison and confinement of it; and that they looked on the body as the great incumbrance, clog, and fetter of the mind; and its perpetual release from it, as its perfection and happiness. And therefore the doctrine of the *resurrection of the body*, understood in the first obvious view of it, as a restoration of the *same animal* kind of body, which we now have, must appear to them absurd and incredible; and they might well put the question with a sneer: *How are the dead raised up?* In what state and condition; and particularly with what body do they come? And these *questions* were actually put by the *ancient enemies of Christianity*, who are

\* Somn. Scrip. p. 600, 601.

† An fortes animæ, dignataque numina cælo,  
Corporibus resoluta suis, terraque remissa,  
Huc migrant ex orbe, suumque habitantia cælum  
Ætheros vivunt annos, mundoque fruuntur?

Manil. v. 756.—759.  
repre-

represented by one of the primitive Christian writers, as making these inquiries, and thus reasoning with contempt §. “ I would fain know, says one of them, whether they are to rise without bodies, or with them? If with bodies, what sort of ones? With the very same they had, or with new ones? Or without a body? Without a body, there is neither mind, nor soul, nor life. If with a body, is it exactly the former one that is already dissolved? If with another body, then there arises a new man, instead of restoring and repairing the former one.” And these objections were urged as unanswerable.

But all the difficulties and objections to this capital article of Christianity will intirely vanish, when St. Paul's doctrine relating to it is rightly explained and clearly understood; and therefore in speaking to these words, I shall

I. Endeavour to state *St. Paul's doctrine* concerning this article.

II. Shew you *how groundless the objections* are that are urged against it.

III. Briefly represent the *truth and importance of it.*

I. I am to consider *what St. Paul's doctrine of the resurrection is*, which he represents as an answer to the questions in my text. And the Apostle is very large and copious in explaining it. Our *blessed Lord* himself expressly and frequently preached the *resurrection of the dead*, without entering much into the nature, or



416 *Doctrine of a Resurrection explained.* Sermon. 15.  
giving any particular explication of it; only once, when the *Sadducees* thought to have confounded him, by asking him, *whose wife the woman*, who had been successively married to seven brethren, *should be in the resurrection?* he so far explained the article, as was necessary to confute and silence them; telling them: *Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God* †. *They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more; for they are equal to the Angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection* ||. From this account it appears, that the state of mankind, by the resurrection from the dead, will be extreamly *different* from what it now is, and unspeakably *more happy and glorious* than the present. And this will more evidently appear from the representation given of it by the Apostle to the Corinthians; and we may consider the description he gives of it, in the *negative* and *positive* view of it. And I would here observe,

1. That the Apostle *no where* says, that it shall be the *resurrection of the same body*. Had he said this, I suppose the question would have been returned; *With what body, with which of the several bodies, in which our souls dwell, shall we rise?* For we all know, that our bodies are varying and changing every day, subject to perpetual and total alterations.

† Mat. xxii. 29.    || Luke xx. 35, 36.

How *different* in form and stature are those bodies we are possessed of in our *infancy* and *childhood*, from those we have in *youth* and *manhood*; and these from what we carry about us in *old age*; and those which we have in *health* and *vigour*, from those which are *distempered*, *emaciated* and *corrupted*, and which we lay down in the *grave*? So that we cannot say, it is the *same body* that rises, which we have in infancy and childhood, or which we have in old age, or which disease hath enfeebled and destroyed; because such a resurrection would be an *unhappiness* to us, and a resurrection to a life of dishonour, affliction and misery. And if we assign the bodies we have in any particular period of our lives, it can never with propriety be called the *same body* with that which we had in any foregoing or subsequent part of our lives, because of the perpetual changes which they undergo, becoming in some respect different from their former selves, every moment of their existence. And as the Apostle never calls the body that shall rise the *same body*, that term can never be necessary to express the truth of his doctrine. I allow that there is a certain sense, in which we may be said to arise with the *same bodies*; so far the *same*, as to be *properly our own*, and as shall have *all the sensories* necessary to the *inlet of knowledge*, and as shall probably make us to be *known* for the *same persons* we were in the present world. But however, as the scripture no where uses the expression of the *same body*, and as that ex-

pression seems to involve us in many difficulties; it should be used with *caution*, and never insisted on as necessary to explain or express this great article of the Christian faith. But,

2. As the Apostle never says that we shall be raised with the same body, so he more than *intimates* that in some respects it *shall not really be the same*. For in his answer to the question, *With what body do they come?* he says, *Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain\**, i. e. It is with regard to the body we live and die with, and that which hereafter we rise with, as it is to the seed we sow in the ground, and the seed that springs up from it. That which we sow must die, in order to its quickening and springing up; the external shell must moisten, corrupt, and rot, or else the grain will entirely perish, and be fruitless, whatever the grain be, whether wheat, or any other kind which the husbandman sows. So must these bodies of ours die and return to the dust, in order to our restoration by a future resurrection. But then as the grain we sow is not the individual grain that rises, so neither is the body that dies, the same individual body that rises. 'Tis *different*, though in *some respects* the *same*; and the body that rises shall be as certainly *similar* to, though

\* Ver. 36, 37.

different from the body that dies, as the grain that springs up is of the same kind with, though different from the grain that is sown. And this difference the Apostle farther illustrates by adding: *All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial, but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead* †. i. e. There is as great a difference between our present bodies, which we are born with, and which we lay down in the grave by death, as there is between the several kinds of flesh that men, and beasts, and fishes, and birds are partakers of, as there is between celestial and terrestrial bodies, and between the sun and moon, and the several stars in the firmament of Heaven, which have all their glory, but a glory that is exceedingly different the one from the other. And in this respect the resurrection of the dead shall resemble them; as the raised body of the Saints shall be greatly unlike to their present, infirm, and mortal bodies, and in circumstances of far superior advantage, dignity and glory. And therefore

3. The Apostle expressly affirms, that we shall *not rise with these fleshly bodies* which we

† Ver. 39.—42.



now carry about with us ; for he tells them : *This I say brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption, inherit incorruption* †. Our fleshly bodies, with the blood and juices, that circulate through our arteries and veins, and the other canals that nature hath formed for their reception, are well suited to the present corruptible and mortal state, in which we now dwell, but are not at all suited to the heavenly world of incorruption, and therefore can never be admitted into the kingdom of God : and from thence he argues, that even as to those *who may be alive*, and dwelling in our world, when the dead shall be raised, *they shall be all changed, as in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we, viz. who are then alive, shall be changed* ||, that we may be as incorruptible as those who are partakers of this glorious resurrection. Cloathed with our present flesh and blood, *no man can see God and live*, and therefore as the seeing God is one essential and principal part of the happiness of a future state, their fleshly bodies must be altered and changed from their present condition, that they may be capable of the beatifick vision, of supporting the glory that shall be hereafter revealed, and of appearing in the majesty and awful presence of the immortal God, before whom angels veil their faces, as sensible of that infinite ma-

† Ver. 50.

|| Ver. 51, 52.

jeſty to which they approach, and of being as it were unable to endure the exceeding brightness that ſurrounds him, *who dwells in light inaccessible and full of glory.* Hence the Apoſtle farther adds :

4. That the reſurrection body ſhall not be like our preſent bodies, formed of *earthly materials*, and capable of being reſolved into its original duſt. In this he is very expreſs. *The firſt man is of the earth, earthy* \*. *Adam*, the firſt of men, was formed, as to his body, *out of the duſt of the ground*, and therefore after his tranſgreſſion, his ſentence was : *In the ſweat of thy face ſhalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it waſt thou taken ; for duſt thou art, and unto duſt ſhalt thou return* †. But *the ſecond man is the Lord from Heaven*, of an heavenly original, and who ſhall appear cloathed with an heavenly body. *And as is the earthy, ſuch are they alſo that are earthy ; and as is the heavenly, ſuch are they alſo that are heavenly* ‡. i. e. As *Adam* had an earthy body, ſo the natural deſcendants of *Adam* have like him earthy bodies, and as Chriſt's glorified body was of an heavenly fabrick and original, ſo alſo ſhall their's be, who belong to, and are intereſted in him. *And as we have borne the image of the earthy, ſo ſhall we alſo bear the image of the heavenly* §. So that theſe earthly bodies, which have their original from the duſt, and by which we are like to *Adam*, the common parent of all mankind, ſhall only

\* Ver. 47. † Gen. iii. 19. ‡ Ver. 48. § Ver. 49.

continue in the present state ; but have no being in the future world ; where we shall be no longer considered as the *posterity* of the *first Adam*, but as the *children of God*, and related to the *second Adam* ; whose glorified body we shall then in our bodies as truly resemble, as we do in these our earthly bodies the *first Adam*, from whom we derive bodies as earthly as his own.

5. Hence farther the Apostle assures us, that we shall not be raised with those *natural bodies* that are necessary to our present condition, and to answer those purposes of life for which we are sent into the present world. The *natural* or *animal* body, is a body subject to all animal appetites, affections, and passions, or under the influence and conduct of that sensitive principle, by which our present bodies are animated and actuated, and to which we owe the instincts and inclinations, that are here necessary to the *preservation of life*, and the *continuance of mankind* in the world. And this sensitive principle is wisely implanted in us by the God of nature, as we live amongst sensible objects, as the sensations we receive, and the tendencies and impulses of the animal part of our constitution, answer very valuable purposes in such a mixed state of being as ours ; insomuch that the proper business of the world could not be carried on without them. But as all our merely animal sensations, appetites and instincts are owing to the temperament of our fleshly bodies, the contexture of our blood,  
and

and the nature and prevalence of the juices that are formed within us; 'tis evident, that as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, so those animal, sensitive, instinctive properties that result from them, and to which we are now conscious, cannot possibly take place therein, but will for ever perish in the grave with those bodies of flesh and blood, in which they are inherent. By these fleshly bodies, and the passions and appetites essential to them, by which we hunger and thirst and taste; fear and love, are angry and pleased, are excited to revenge, and other criminal gratifications, we are immediately united and allied to the brutal world; and formed a real *race of animals*, though of a distinct and superior kind from the other species that inhabit our earth. And unless the future world be just such another place as this, 'tis evident that these *natural*, i. e. *animal* fleshly bodies, with the sensual properties that reside in them, would be of no kind of use there, and as wholly improper for that state of things, as a refined heavenly body would be for the present, gross, and material one, and therefore the Apostle observes, *there is a natural body, and a spiritual body*\*, i. e. the animal body is one, the spiritual another. *Adam*, our first parent, was created with an *animal* one; for thus it is written, *the first man Adam was made a living soul*, it should have been, a *living animal*; whereas the last *Adam*, or Christ, was

\* Ver. 42.



*made a quickning spirit †; had not only life himself, but by that eternal spirit that dwelt in him was able to quicken, and give life to others, even to as many as he pleased. Howbeit that was not first which was spiritual, but that which is animal, and afterwards that which is spiritual ‡.* The natural is to take place here, and to return to its first principles of dust, but is never to be restored after its dissolution, nor to enter into the regions of life and glory. Farther,

6. The bodies restored at the resurrection shall *not be weak and infirm*, like our present ones. Here 'tis but little that the most athletick and robust constitutions will permit men to do. Many of the mere brutal creation excel them in strength. The strength they have is soon liable to decay and be impaired by exercise and labour, to be weakened by pain, to be diminished by distemper, to be wasted by age, and wholly destroyed by the force of an unexpected accident. And this must necessarily be the state of all human bodies, considering the loose, unconnected, powerless materials out of which they are formed, the uses and purposes they are intended to answer, the short duration for which they are designed, the infinite number of parts of which they are constituted, the fineness of their contexture, the nature of the provisions by which they are supported, and the innumerable accidents, by which they are

† Ver. 45.

‡ Ver. 46.

liable to be injured, broken, and even dissolved and destroyed. But all these imperfections and frailties are peculiar to these present bodies, and not one of them shall affect those that God shall provide for us at the future resurrection.

7. Hence farther they shall *not* be like our present bodies, *attended with any circumstances of dishonour and shame*, to humble and mortify us, and make us sensible of the meanness of our condition, and almost repine at our lot in the present life. There is in all mankind a natural aversion to appear as nature formed us, we are almost instinctively prompted to hide ourselves from one another. Our ornaments, our pride, our elegance, are not in our *persons* but our *dress*. We are beholden to the worm for our splendor and gaiety, we run to the beasts of the field for our covering, protection, and warmth, and to the bowels of the earth for our lusture and brilliancy\*. The very parts of our bodies are some of them less honourable than others; they are in the whole composition of them, what St. Paul calls them, *vile bodies* †; the words mean, either of a very low or mean original, of poor, contemptible materials; or else *bodies of humiliation*, the consideration of which may justly humble and mortify us, who are confined to and dwell in them; as they are the seat of many dishonourable and sinful passions, and criminal affections, that frequently prompt

\* 1 Cor. xii. 23.

† Phil. iii. 21.

to many offences against God, as they are liable to corruption, as they contract perpetual soil, as they expose us to pain, infirmity, and disorder, and subject us to a thousand inconveniencies and afflictions whilst we dwell in them. So that sometimes we live long enough to be ashamed of our deformities, and oftener to bend under the infirmities and burthens of them, and wish ourselves safely delivered from the incumbrance that oppresses us. Thanks be to God, that though it be thus *sown in dishonour*, though we are born with, continually carry about us, and finally lay down in the grave, these bodies which frequently disgrace and mortify us, yet they shall be raised in such circumstances, as that we shall be no longer ashamed of them, nor ever mortified with any of the present inconveniencies and infirmities that now attend them. And what creates yet a farther difference is,

8. Lastly, that the bodies we shall receive at the resurrection, shall *not be* like our present bodies, *corruptible and mortal*. It is *sown in corruption*, and liable to dissolution and mortality. The moment we are born, we may be said to begin to die; as we bring the seeds of death with us into the world, and as every moment we live is a kind of preparative for, and nearer approach to death. And at the appointed season, we must all of us descend to the grave, and as to these grosser bodies lie for ever buried in the darkness and ruins of it. For when we arise to a new life

at the morning of the resurrection, mortality and corruption shall never enter into our frame, nor the materials of which our heavenly bodies shall be composed, ever be liable to separation and dissolution. So that in answer to this question, *With what body do they come?* we can give this pleasing answer: That they shall be in many important respects *different from our present ones*; they shall not consist of *flesh and blood*, such as our constitution now consists of; they shall not be formed of *earthly materials*, like the body of *Adam*, who was taken from the dust; they shall not be like these natural or *animal* bodies, nor have any of those propensities, instincts and appetites, that connect us with the brute creation, and often-times prompt men to live like the brutes that perish; they shall not be *weak and infirm*, nor ever more subject us to the disorders and decays we here are liable to; they shall not be bodies of *dishonour and shame*, nor have any circumstances attending them to reproach, afflict, and mortify us; and therefore shall never be *liable to corruption and death*, which throws a vanity over all the boast and pride of life, levels the proudest of mortals with the dust, and should cloath the sons of men with condescension, meekness and humility. And Oh! how doth this *ennoble our conceptions of a future state*, and in what a *comfortable and pleasing view* doth it represent *death* itself, which brings us to the eternal world! We find and feel innumerable disadvantages in our present state of being, against  
which



which no external advantages can guard us. The materials of our present bodies are of the lowest kind, frail and soon injured and displaced. We are exposed by our bodies to innumerable disorders, every pore is an inlet to distemper, every nerve may give us an exquisite sense of pain, and every part of our bodies may torment us. So that in reality they may well be called the *prisons of the soul*, wherein they are fettered and confined, like criminals, and undergo a kind of torture, till the time of our dismissal from them, And even this dismissal is generally with such a violence, as gives us the highest uneasiness, and throws us into convulsive agonies of distress; so that had we our option to return to life in the same circumstances in which we often drag on and leave it; if we acted a wise part we should certainly refuse it, and to accept it would be a kind of folly and distraction \*. But, thanks be to God, as Christians we have better hopes. Life shall be restored us. Our souls shall be again united to their bodies, but to bodies better moulded, *to buildings made of God*, and that shall carry all the proof of a divine fabrick; shall be attempered with better materials, that shall be proof against all disorders, that shall have no inlets to pain and misery, that shall be liable to no dissolution, and over

\* O pater, anne aliquas ad cœlum hinc ire putandum est  
Sublimes animas, iterumque ad tarda reverti  
Corpora? Quæ lucis miseris tam dita cupido!

Virgil, *Ænead.* 6. v. 719—721.  
which

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which death shall have no farther power and dominion. And you will easily see, that by this account, the most formidable objections against this doctrine are already answered ; but they will be more effectually so, when we have considered the *positive* part of St. Paul's description of the state and circumstance of the resurrection, which we shall do in our next discourse.



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## S E R M O N XVI.

Of the advantageous Alterations which will be made in the Bodies of the Saints when raised.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 35.

*But some man will say : How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come ?*

**H**AVING given a view in the preceding discourse of the *negative part* of St. Paul's description of the *state and circumstances of the resurrection* ; we shall now proceed to consider the *positive part of it*, or what is the *real condition* in which the Saints of God shall be *raised from the dead* ; and the Apostle directs our thoughts to the following particulars.

1. That they shall be *bodies immediately fashioned by God*, and the constitution and fabric of them entirely depend on his pleasure. This thought he points out to us, when he says, with respect to the seed we sow, *that God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him* \* ; an answer equally proper to the question, *How*

\* Ver. 38.

*are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?* God forms the body of what materials he pleases, and fashions it according to the direction of his own power, wisdom and goodness. He is equal to the work, and the resurrection is not beyond his ability to accomplish. Leave the event to his management, and never doubt but what is raised shall be a production worthy his infinite perfection to be the author of. The seed thrown into the ground seems to perish and corrupt; and must do so, before the seminal vegetative principle can exert itself and act. And yet it soon appears in the pleasing verdure of its grass, strikes up into the stem, grows into the ear, and puts on a much more gay form and body, than when it was thrown into the ground. Tell me, now, thou who doubtest of the future resurrection: How comes this new form to spring up out of the old one dissolved and perished? How comes new life to spring up out of corruption and death? By what power is this amazing change? Hadst thou never seen it, wouldst thou not have believed it incredible and impossible, and now thou knowest it to be true, account for it if thou can'st? If thou dost account for it in a reasonable manner, and ascribe this marvellous effect, for such it really is, to a competent cause, thou wilt thereby account for the resurrection of the dead, and knowest to what all powerful agent to attribute it. For in both cases, God gives the body as he pleases.

*We*



*We shall have a building of God, an house, not made with hands †. But,*

2. As God giveth to the seed that is sown a body as it pleases him, but yet gives to every kind of grain or seed its own body, so also shall it be at the resurrection of the dead; we shall arise in the human form, we shall appear the creatures we are, as distinct from all other sort of living beings whatsoever, and the bodies that we shall be raised with shall abundantly discover us to be the children of men, though raised and exalted to the dignity and privileges of the sons of God. The grain that is sown is quite different from the grain produced, and yet wheat produces wheat, and the God of nature causes every grain to furnish its own kind. 'Tis true, that the advantages of our new raised bodies will be unspeakably superior to any that we can boast of in the present state. But this by no means causes us to cease to be men, or makes us different creatures from ourselves. The difference of dress and habit, of country and dwelling, of health and sickness, of youth or age, of any or all external circumstances that befall us, changes nothing of our natures, nor makes us cease to be what we originally were. And that power of God, who originally formed us out of the dust, and gave us our constitution, shape, form, and distinguishing features, can with equal ease new mould and fashion us, and

† 2 Cor. v. 1.

not only continues us the same kind, and in the same rank of creatures that we were; but if that be necessary, and will answer any wise and good purpose, preserve the features and complexion and form that prevailed in us, that we may not only be *known* to be the *children of men*, but be known by ourselves and others, to be the *individual persons* we were in the present world: I say this God *can* do, and from thence we may certainly infer that he *will do it*, if it be *expedient* to the promoting his glory, the illustration of his faithfulness in the accomplishment of his promises, or shall be necessary to contribute any real share to the happiness and satisfaction of those who shall be accounted worthy of the resurrection.

3. Hence farther, the bodies that shall be restored to us at the resurrection shall be *our own bodies*, as certainly and with the same propriety, as our present bodies are our own, and we know them to be so; in distinction from the bodies of all other persons whatsoever. The reason why we call these bodies *our own*, is not because they have continued the same, without any material alteration, ever since we have been born; for they have not continued the same for any one single moment of their duration; and have undergone probably many total changes, during the time we have lived and acted in them. So that our present bodies are no more properly our own, as that implies our perpetually consisting of any settled determinate portion of

matter, that never separates from us, and that we do not exchange for any other, than the bodies of other men and other animals are ours. But they are our own, as they are, whatever they consist of, and how often so ever they may vary and change, and though they alter every day and moment, yet they are our own, *as we carry them about with us*, as they are distinct from all other bodies, as they are *under our management*, and we are able to controul them; as we *feel their wants*, and constantly *supply them*; as we are *conscious to their disorders*, and *apply the proper remedies* for their cure; and for many other reasons of a like nature, that might easily be mentioned. In like manner the bodies we receive at the resurrection, though there should not enter into the composition of them any one single particle of which they consist, in any given period of their duration here, will be as much and as truly our own, as the bodies we now have are our own, though they have undergone a total alteration during the year past; for when we are restored at the resurrection, we shall find those *glorious bodies as fully and firmly united to us*, as our *present* are, have them *more entirely under our management and controul*, shall be able to actuate and move them at our pleasure, be capable of employing them in such services and exercises, as are suitable to our then condition of life, making them minister to our pleasure and happiness, shall be *conscious to their tendencies*, and have it in our power to *gratify them*, and *maintain and support*

*part them* in eternal health, activity and vigour. And we may therefore further affirm,

4. That the bodies we shall receive at the resurrection shall be the *same bodies* we carried about in this world, in a very *proper sense*, and in as true and real one, as we can affirm, that we have the same bodies during the whole or any period of our existence in the present world. *In some respects* we have the *same* bodies now that we had in infancy, childhood, and through every period of our duration; not because they have continued unchangeably the same, since they have been in a perpetual flux, every day receiving new accessions by the food we eat, and flying off from us by the various discharges of nature, altering in size, strength, feature, comeliness, habits, affections and passions, by the various accidents of life, the very principles we embrace, the friendships we contract, the employments we discharge, the labours we exercise ourselves in, the pleasures we pursue, the afflictions that befall us, the increase of our years, and all the different circumstances, to which nature and providence introduce us. And yet they are still justly accounted the same, because *our union to them is perpetual and fixed*, our various members constantly resemble themselves, have the same uses, give us the same sensations, are avenues to the same kind of gratifications, expose us to the same disorders and afflictions, equally obey the dictates of our mind, have the same tendencies and dispositions, and continue to prompt and

F f 2

influence



influence us by many of the same passions and affections. Our various *features* that alter by time and accident, yet have such a perpetual *sameness*, that we know our own persons, and are known by all others that we are acquainted with; the actions that we have done in the *earliest* parts of life, we are *equally conscious to* in the *latest*. If we have been pious towards God, and charitable to men, we find, we feel, we are sure, that these hearts have been lifted up, and these knees have been bent in prayer, and these lips employed in celebrating God's praises, and these hands have ministered to the poor, and these feet carried us about doing good, year after year, and habitually through all the preceding periods of our lives, and we have no doubt but that these same bodies, whatever be their alterations in a course of years, have been employed in these sacred and benevolent services.

We have the same kind of remorse for what we do amiss, many years after the actions themselves, and a criminal, convicted ever so long a period after his crimes, knows that he did, that his hands perpetrated what he is convicted of, and that he is worthy of punishment in his body upon account of it; doth not pretend to censure the equity of his judges for inflicting the punishment, under a pretence that his body hath undergone many alterations since the perpetrating the crime; nor ever imagine that the plea, that his body is not the same that it was when he committed the offence, will or ought to exempt him

him from the chastisement he deserves. He is conscious that he is the person, and all the changes in his bodily constitution can never alter that consciousness, or persuade him to think, that he is not the man that he then was. In like manner, in whatsoever circumstances the *resurrection* may alter our bodies, we shall know them to be as *much the same*, and as much *our own*, as we know our *present* bodies to be so. The union between them and our minds shall be as real, firm and intimate, as our present union of soul and body is. We may have the *same resemblance* of person, shape, limbs, habit, and features to distinguish us hereafter, and point out our *personality* as we have now; for such distinctions seem to be as necessary, to prevent confusion in a future world as in the present. We shall then have the most absolute certainty that we once lived in this lower world, that we were sinners against God, that we were recovered by his grace, that we were renewed by his spirit, that we were preserved and conducted by his power, that we stood in such relations of being, that God employed us in such services, that we did such good works, that we suffered such things for religion, and that we died at such a period after we had served God in our generation. The moment we *awake*, these consciousnesses will immediately *return*, with a full conviction and liveliness, as they do in the *morning*, after the kindly refreshment of the sleep of the night. Besides, these bodies shall be of

the same with our present ones, as they shall have all the *same senses* that are *essential* to our nature, though in a more perfect and exalted manner. Our eyes shall see and contemplate the wonders of God's creation, and be so strengthened as to be able to behold the glory of the immortal God, and stand in the presence of the eternal majesty of Heaven. Our ears shall be opened and purged to receive the harmony of angels songs, and our tongues join in concert with them, in celebrating the praises of our God. *New sensories* may be added to our natures, that may be avenues of new entertainments, whilst the *perfecting* our *former and original ones* shall be an abundant confirmation, that we are the same compound beings that we were, the defects of our natures only removed, that would degrade and dishonour our condition, or interrupt and lessen the happiness of it. And therefore it can be no objection to this sameness of body,

That our bodies at the resurrection *shall not be of the Earth earthy, but like the Lord from Heaven, heavenly.* i. e. Either of heavenly materials, in opposition to ingredients of dust, that enter into the composition of our present frame, or, of an heavenly, bright, and splendid appearance. Our present bodies are formed out of the earth in which we dwell, and are supported by food that the earth produces, that they may be suited to the nature and condition, the actions and life of that world where God hath appointed us our present

present habitation. And by a parity of reason, as the future celestial world is greatly different from this, will present us with different objects, will open to our view quite other scenes, will admit us to new employments, pleasures, pursuits, and acquaintances, and as the life we are there to live, will be in every respect superior to that which we live here, maintained by more substantial and excellent provisions, and formed for a much more permanent duration; so our bodies, in order to fit us for the better state, will be constituted of heavenly ingredients, and new fashioned of such materials, as shall be worthy of and suitable to that superior state of perfection and glory; probably of the same kind and nature with those glorious habitations in which the *Angels of God* dwell, who tho' spiritual beings, yet can become *visible*, and appear cloathed with a *celestial brightness*; who are unquestionably known by, and appear to each other, have their respective mansions in the heavenly world, and often meet together in large assemblies, for purposes peculiar to their exalted character and stations. For if every thing in that world were *invisible*, and Angels and Saints were not known to, and seen by each other, what would it be but a world of *blanks*, to what purpose the resurrection of any bodies, or how should we know that we were come to the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of Angels, to the spirits of the just made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant? But he appears



in a *divine* and *heavenly* glory, *Angels* are as a *flaming fire*, and the *lusture* of *believers* is radiant and bright, formed of the same celestial ingredients as *the glorified body of Christ* himself.

Agreeable to this is what the Apostle farther adds: That the bodies we are to receive by the resurrection shall be *spiritual* ones, in opposition to our present *natural*, i. e. *sensitive* and *animal* bodies. Even matter itself, how ever gross, inert and unactive it may appear, yet may be refined and purified from its dregs, spiritualized, rendered subtle and active, and transformed into much more pure, quick and lively systems, than any that are visible to our eyes, in the common course of things; as is evident from many experiments and discoveries that have been made in natural philosophy. *Light* itself is a body of a very *subtle*, *penetrating nature*, and of an almost incredible *velocity*. And though we see and feel the effects of it, we see not the body itself, and know nothing of the nature and contexture of its particles. We feel the *air* and *wind*, but 'tis not the object of our *sight*. The *magnetick effluvia* fill us with admiration, but who knows any thing more of them, than by their wonderful effects? The powers of *electricity* have opened a new field for philosophical inquiries, the operations of them are extremely sensible, they pass from object to object almost instantaneously; they sometimes appear in flames of fire, sometimes like burning meteors in Heaven, and sometimes give a sudden explosion like a stroke of thunder. But  
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of what it consists is one of the *arcana* of nature, no eye is quick enough to discern it, and no fixed and settled scheme can yet be formed, to account for the operations of it, and reduce them to any determinate and certain laws. And others have yet gone farther, and have imagined a yet finer *etherial fluid*, that spreads itself throughout all nature, and which they consider as the one general material cause of all the laws of nature, and into which all the operations of natural causes and effects are, *under God*, to be finally resolved. These may be called the *spiritual powers* of the *material universe*, and I mention them only to let you see, in what sense our raised bodies may be transformed into spiritual ones, and yet at the same time be really and truly compositions of matter, as our present bodies are. This however may, I think, be very safely concluded on, that they shall be so far *spiritual* bodies, as to be utterly *free* from those *animal and merely sensitive* properties and affections, that are essential to our present frames, shall need nothing of those *grosser provisions* that we now want for their sustenance, shall want *no rest* to refresh them, *no sleep* to recruit and repair them, *no prescriptions of physick* to relieve and cure them, shall not be sluggish and unactive to hinder or retard their motion, shall be nimble and active, may *fly as quick as thought*, may be conveyed by a ray of light from globe to globe, may with an inconceivable velocity transport themselves to the most distant

distant parts of God's creation, and traverse the utmost bounds of nature, in an infinitely easier manner, than here we can remove to the objects that are nearest us, or as our minds can now convey us from Earth to Heaven, and from the footstool of God's throne, to his immediate presence and glory; nor subject to any of those inconveniencies, that now exercise our patience, and often render our bodies uneasy and burthensome to us.

And what is necessarily connected with this is, that though we bring into the world with us, weak, frail and feeble bodies, yet they shall be *raised in power*, with a strength and vigour, in comparison of which the strongest constitution is mere nothing and vanity. As they shall not consist of *flesh and blood*, such as our present bodies are composed of; they shall not be liable to any of those *weaknesses* to which we are exposed, nor to any of those *distempers* that are perpetually circulating through our veins, and that will sooner or later discover themselves, and bring down the firmest constitution. They will have no *inward* causes of corruptions, and be intirely proof against all *external* injuries. The most active services will not weaken them, nor will any length of duration impair and waste them. *The Angels* are beings that *excell in strength*, and the *Resurrection* will render us *equal to the Angels of God*; and what is now wholly out of our power, and surpasses the strength of all mortal men, will then be performed with the utmost facility

facility and ease. He who created the inhabitants of the old world, though they were of the *Earth* *earthy*, with that robustness, vigour and strength of constitution, as that they could *endure* for near *a thousand years*, can *anew* create us *for a duration without end*, and with a strength and power that nothing shall abate and destroy; and he who made us able to *move our own bodies*, or *put another body into motion*, or *stop* or *retard* its motion, or *alter* its course and tendency, can with the same ease enable us to *remove mountains*. Weakness and frailty is the characteristick of the present life, and the little power of action we have is continually liable to decay. Power and strength are the privileges of the future life, and the resurrection shall restore us vigorous and active in the whole of our constitution.

And as we shall be raised *in strength*, so also shall we be raised *in honour*; in such circumstances of *external splendor*, as shall be suitable to the nature and circumstances of that better world where we are to dwell, and the majesty of that presence in which we are to appear; as shall be a *full manifestation of our being the children of God*, and the genuine disciples of the glorified Son of God. In the *Resurrection to life* that Daniel speaks of, he assures us \*, that they who are wise shall be as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn

\* Dan. xii. 3.



many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever. Agreeable to this is what our Lord assures us, that in the great day, when the collection of all mankind shall be made, *the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father \**, shall be invested and surrounded with such an external lustre from the presence of God, and the brightness of his glory, as shall declare them accepted and favourites of God. Of what kind this glory shall be, we may form some conception from the transfiguration of Christ, when his face shone as the sun, and his raiment was white as light †; or from his appearance to Saul, when the light of his glory, that surrounded this mad persecutor, shone above the brightness of the sun ‡ at noon day. For we are expressly assured, that we shall be formed after the pattern of Christ, and fashioned in our bodies according to his own glorified body. This our Saviour intimates himself, in his last affectionate prayer for all of them that should believe in him. *Father, I will, I desire, that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me, where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me §.* To behold Christ's glory signifies more than barely to view it, even to partake of it, for our Lord says of them: *The glory which thou gavest me, I have given unto them, that they may be one, even as we are one ||.* And this is what St. Paul expressly affirms in seve-

\* Mat. xiii. 43

§ John xvii. 24.

† xvii. 2.

|| Ver. 22.

‡ Acts xxvi. 13.

ral of his Epistles. Thus in the chapter where my text is. *The first man is of the Earth earthy; the second man is the Lord from Heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy, and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the earthy in these earthy bodies in which we now dwell, we shall also bare the image of the heavenly\**, in those glorified bodies with which we shall be invested in the morning of the resurrection; for as he expresses it, in that noble passage in his epistle to the *Philippians*: *Our conversation is in Heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself†*. Hence the same Apostle exhorts the *Colossians*, *to set their affections on things above, and not on things on the Earth‡*, because as Christians we are dead, viz. to all the sinful pursuits and pleasures of the world, *and our life is hid with Christ in God*; our proper life and happiness is the same that Christ himself possesses in the presence and kingdom of God his Father; and therefore *when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory*. And this conformity to Christ in the glory of his heavenly state, will be one substantial proof of our being the *children of God*. Here the gospel revelation gives us this honourable

\* Ver. 47.—49. † Phillip. iii. 20, 21. ‡ Colos. iii. 2, 3, 4.

character. *Beloved, now are we the children of God* \*. Whence doth this appear? Why, *it doth not yet appear what we shall be*. Our expectations are future; and our inheritance as the children of God laid up in the heavenly world, and shall not be fully revealed 'till the second coming of Christ; and of this we are certain that *when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*. He is the pattern after which the Christian is to live in the present world, and according to which he shall be glorified in the next. If our minds and characters resemble him now, in the splendor and beauties of holiness, our bodies also shall hereafter resemble his, in the light and glory that shall surround them. There shall be *no marks of shame and dishonour* in them, when that blessed day of the resurrection restores them; *nothing of deformity* to render them contemptible, *no impurity* to defile them, *no defect* to injure them, nothing that can create in us any conscious shame, or give occasion to any of the inhabitants of Heaven to behold us with displeasure, or avoid our society as beneath and unworthy of them. The same power and goodness that gives us the inheritance of the heavenly world, will suit both our inward dispositions, and our external condition to the nature and circumstances of that world; and as the children of God, and the redeemed disciples of Jesus Christ, our

\* 1 John iii. 2.

whole state shall be happy and glorious; that there may be a proper conformity between the Redeemer and his followers, and we may not appear, even in our external condition, less in dignity and honour, than becomes the nearness of our relation to the greatest and best of beings, or what may be expected from the infinite power and bounty of the all perfect and infinitely blessed God, our heavenly Father. And, finally,

What is the perfection and crown of all is, that God will raise us up at the last great day in a state of *absolute and perfect incorruption*; for though it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption, and as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor corruption inherit incorruption, so this corruptible body must put on incorruption, and this mortal body must put on immortality. And when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass that saying which is written: *Death is swallowed up in victory*; and the Christian shall cry out in those glorious words of triumph: *O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is now thy victory? Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.* O happy world, where death never enters, where that destroyer hath no power! Here he exercises universal dominion, enters into every family, thins every society, and spares neither age, nor sex, nor con-



dition in life. How many have lately been removed from this society, and have I followed within a very few years to the gates of death! One, but a few days ago, have we lodged in his sepulchre, a constant worshipper in this place, and one of the oldest disciples that remained amongst us; an honest, a liberal, and a good man. But the hand of death knows no distinction of men. The time will be, and we know not how soon it may be, and *the places that now know us, shall know us no more*; when we shall be removed from our seats in the house of God, from our own habitations and families, and from all the means and opportunities of salvation, that here, through the grace of God, we are allowed to enjoy. The *immortal spirit*, that is properly *ourselves*, is but *uncertainly lodged*, sees the defects of its present tabernacle, views its approaching dissolution, and looks out for a more durable and fixed dwelling. Now as Christians *we know*, that *when our earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we shall have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens* \*; and what the Apostle says of himself, with respect to the gospel with which he was intrusted, we may every one say of his own reasonable spirit. *We have this treasure in earthen vessels* †, frail and brittle in their composition, soon liable to be broken by a thousand accidents, and in their very nature formed

\* 2 Cor. v. 1.

† 2 Cor. iv. 7.

but for a short duration. But let us remember, that this is the only world in which mortality can reach us. We are born for a future existence of a more permanent duration. What only of us is corruptible descends to the grave, and shall for ever continue in the ruins of it. And why should we be more concerned for depositing part of ourselves there, than for what we are losing every day we live. What matters it to us, to what part of the dust our dust returns. Wheresoever it rests, it shall no more trouble us, nor do the least injury to our better part, which shall live, when that lies wholly lifeless and unactive, and live in more glorious circumstances by being for ever removed from that incumbrance and weight. The day is coming, *when all that sleep in their graves shall awake, and when all that sleep in Jesus God shall bring with him,* clothed in garments of immortality, and in soul and body perfected, and fitted for the mansions of everlasting and incorruptible blessedness: When all the elect of God, the whole family of the faithful shall be gathered together in one assembly, when we shall be restored to our friends, who have gone before us, who have lived and died by the principles of a divine faith; and we and they, purified from all our present moral defects, divested of mortality, triumphing over death, clothed with celestial glory, and thus fitted for the regions of immortality, shall, under the banners of the Son of God, and

cloathed in his image, be introduced into the immediate presence of *his God and our God, his Father and our Father.* To that blessed place would I direct my own and lead your views. There would I finally meet you, and rejoice with and over you for ever; and that this may be our united happiness, *as we have this hope, let us purify ourselves as Christ is pure, for nothing that defiles can enter into Heaven, and unless they follow after holiness, none can see God.*



## S E R M O N XVII.

The Objections against the Resurrection answer'd.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 35.

*But some man will say: How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?*

HAVING largely considered the account which the apostle gives of the *circumstances* of the *future resurrection*, I now come to shew you,

That the *objections* which are urged against it, by the *ancients*, or by *modern enemies of revelation*, are *not* of that force and consequence, as to move any just suspicion of the truth of the doctrine; much less, to persuade any wise or thoughtful person to reject it. And these objections may be reduced to *three*, which are these:

- I. The *impossibility* of the thing.
  - II. The *impropriety* of God's doing it. And
  - III. The *undesirableness* of it, on our part, if it were *possible* in itself, or fit to be done.
- I. Let us consider the *impossibility* of a *future resurrection*; for if this can be proved, all kind of arguments that can be produced



in defence of it, can be of no avail, and must fall entirely to the ground. And indeed if there be any thing in the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection, that evidently and certainly implies a contradiction, we may then pronounce it absurd; and affirm, that 'tis impossible even for God to effect it; not through want of power in God, but because the thing itself is not an object of power; doth not come within the reach of it, and is not in its own nature capable of being done. And this is the circumstance that must be fairly proved, in order to argue the impossibility of the resurrection. If it doth *not* involve a real absurdity and contradiction, *it is possible*, and a real object of power. To argue, that we have *no instance* of it in nature, and that it cannot be effected by the *common and ordinary laws of nature*, is not arguing, but *trifling*. For if it be no contradiction, it may certainly be done. It is an object of power, and for aught we know, there may exist a being of power every way equal to it. If the *settled* laws of nature cannot extend to the doing it, doth it follow that there is no *other power* which is *equal* to the production of such an effect.

But what is *nature*, and what are the *laws of nature*, that all the possibilities of effects must be limited by and confined to them? If nature be a merely material unintelligent, inert, unactive thing, nothing is more certain than that nature can never raise a dead man, and that all the known laws of it are utterly insufficient for so wonderful a thing. But then  
this

this same *nature* will be as absolutely *incapable* of *making* a man as *raising him*, and may as easily raise him to a second life, as call him to the first. And as men are continually made, and cannot be made by an unconscious inactive cause; either nature is not the former of man, nor of any one single object that comes into being; or nature must have power to act, and intelligence and wisdom to direct and guide its actions; and what are called the laws of nature, are not the settled and necessary operations of *material* and *insensible* causes, which properly are no causes at all; but the *voluntary* appointment and settlement of a *real active cause*, superior to all material causes; whose wisdom not only at first settled the whole train of natural causes and effects; but still continues to uphold and direct them in their proper exercise and operations: And thus we have found out a cause *equal* to the restoring life when lost; as well as of giving it, when before it was not: For why should one exceed the power of the supream cause, more than the other? Can any one account for the formation of any one man that comes into the world? As wise a man, as any of the objectors against the resurrection, was not afraid to say: *Thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, and how the bones do grow in the womb of her who is with child* †. Have any by philosophy and experiments attained to this wonderful discovery? 'Twould be a discovery

† Ecclef. xi. 5.

indeed, that would immortalise the name of him that could make it. But we well know all that unbelievers can say on this subject; and if they say any thing to the purpose, they must resolve the whole process of nature in the formation of man, to the energy and skill of the God of nature, who as he at first *made man out of the dust, and breathed into him the breath of life*, whereby he became a living soul; so throughout all the generations of men continues to form their imperfect substance, to fashion all our various members, to *cloath us with skin and flesh, to fence us with bones and sinews*, and to direct all the movements of nature to the perfection of this amazing and excellent production. And even as to this, the first mass is entirely lifeless and dead. Life and motion are gradual productions. All men that live, as they once were not, so when they begin to be, are *first of all dead, and then raised to life*. Where then is the impossibility of being raised again to life, after they have lived and died, any more than of being raised to life from death before they ever lived?

If it should be said, that the formation of every man is owing to certain *fixed* laws, that certainly and invariably produce their effects; whereas the resurrection is not pretended to be owing to any such natural and original settlement, it may be answered: That these laws do not necessarily and invariably produce their effects. Nature sometimes, yea frequently, *misses her aim, brings nothing to perfection*  
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and life, and is irregular in her productions ; and the conclusion from hence is, that *nature*, or *material causes*, that cannot direct their own operations, need a *superior power* to direct them ; and that they would perpetually blunder, and fall into continual irregularities and mistakes, were they left to themselves ; and that the God of nature permits these irregularities and failures to take place, to put men in mind, that the formation of human bodies is his work, that life is his gift, and that the continuance of mankind in the world is owing to the continued care of his providence, to whose sovereign will and pleasure all natural causes are intirely and absolutely subject.

And farther, how invariably soever nature may keep to one plan, in the formation of mere animals, to the several species of which she gives the same kind of instincts and propensities, without any kind of difference, or superiority of any in the same species to others ; yet in the *formation of man* she acts with a *perpetual* and *amazing variety*, never casting two exactly in the same mould, nor fashioning them alike, not only as to features, complexion, shape and size, but as to instincts, tendencies, dispositions, studies and pursuits ; so that in these things they are as different from each other, as they are in the shape of their bodies from the brutes themselves. *Some* have capacities that elevate them almost to an equality with *Angels* ; *others* so low, as to be scarce a degree above the *beasts that perish*. Some are fitted for *mathematical inquiries*, others



for *philosophical and moral* ones. Some are extremely sagacious in *making new discoveries*, the talent of others is in *improving* them. Some are formed for *action*, others for *contemplation and study* : Some for *business and commerce*, others with a *contempt and hatred of it*. Some with *strong*, others with *weak passions*. In a word, the difference is perpetual, and so amazingly great, as that they seem to be almost several different species of beings. And by consequence, nature doth not act in the production of men, by any *invariable* rules, from which she never deviates ; for then *all* men would be *alike* in every circumstance of their body, and in all their dispositions and tendencies ; but delights in variety in such a manner, as abundantly shews, she is under no confinement, but acts at liberty according to her pleasure. But this can never be accounted for, by angels or men, if nature be nothing but a material and inactive cause ; but is easily and certainly accounted for, if nature be a wise and intelligent cause, or if all the powers of nature be under the direction of an infinitely perfect God.

Besides, do *natural causes exhaust and limit the power of God* ? Can he never act *without* them ? Did he never act but by the mediation of them ? *How then came the world into being* ? By what second and material causes did the Almighty act in the creation, before any of these material causes had any existence, or possible power to act at all ? Unless men run into downright infidelity and atheism, they  
must

must allow, if not that the whole material system is of the creation of God, yet that the arrangement, disposition, order and settled laws of nature are the effects of his power and wisdom ; and by consequence, that God can, and did act in this grand affair without the intervention of any second causes whatsoever. And with respect to the *formation* of *man*, how came he at first into existence ? Did he *create himself* ? Every one sees the plain absurdity of such a supposition, that he could not act *before he was*, or give being to himself, before he had any being. He therefore was the production of another. But was he produced *according to those laws of nature*, by which every man comes into being ? This again implies an absurdity and contradiction, *viz.* that men existed *before the first man* existed, and that the laws of nature, for the formation of man, operated before man himself, to whom those laws only related, and without whom it is impossible they should have any existence. Man therefore was originally formed, without any concurrence of any of the present laws of human generation, by the *immediate power and wisdom of God*. That he was formed *out of the dust of the earth*, as to his body, is the doctrine of revelation, and the truth of that doctrine is evident, because when he dies, his body resolves into dust. God therefore, either immediately *spoke* man into being in an *instant*, or at once ; and therefore can as easily do it a second time ; or his formation was more *gradual* ; the body first prepared, and formed  
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with all its organical parts, and necessary instruments of respiration and life ; and then the vital spirit infused into it, whereby *the man became a living soul*. And this is the account that revelation gives of the origin of man, and his first introduction into being. *The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul* \*. The body was first created to receive the mind, or the house erected to lodge the lord and master of it. And if this was the case, as every circumstance of probability shews us it was ; here is the very thing we want, the fact we are doubting of ; even the raising of a dead body, and speaking a carcase into life ; and a fact that must be allowed, unless we become downright scepticks and unbelievers, even as to the very first principles of all truth and religion. The power of God is therefore not limited by the present ordinary laws of nature ; he can act without them ; man was originally formed without them, by the infinite skill and efficacious power of the creator ; and the efficacy of these ordinary laws, is not from any virtue or active principle in themselves, for as material they are sluggish, and incapable of all action in their own nature ; but from the concurring influence of God, who guides all the operations of nature, and causes them to accomplish the several purposes he intends by them.

\* Gen. ii. 7.

But it will be said, that the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the same body is *absurd and impossible*; because it may happen, that the *body of one man*, or part of it, may be *devoured by another man*; and so by eating and digesting it may become the body, or part of the body of another man; so that at the resurrection, the *same* body can't belong to *both*, and that the parts that one hath, the other must be defective in. This objection was urged by the primitive enemies to Christianity, and though they thought it a very formidable, and even unanswerable one, yet it is a very weak and ridiculous one, and shews their ignorance of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. For supposing the doctrine of the resurrection teaches the restoring the same body, what is *necessary* to constitute this *sameness* of body? What, that *all* the particles that ever enter'd into the composition of the body, should at the resurrection all unite, and form the resurrection body? How *gigantick* would our stature be, and how *unlike* himself would every person hereafter be, from what he at present is, or ever was! But what is worse is, that a body thus formed could in no sense be the *same* body; the body of no man ever consisting *at once* of all these parts put together; and the putting them together would form a quite different body from any that we could ever call our own. What then signifies the food that any man eats, whether of fish or birds, or beasts, or human flesh? What he eats to-day he partly loses to-morrow,  
and



and in a few months will entirely lose it, by the accession of the new food that fills and nourishes him. So that upon this supposition of the absolute sameness of the resurrection body, one man may devour his neighbour, as it happened at the siege of *Jerusalem*; a mother her sucking child, and yet the resurrection of the same body involve not the least appearance of a contradiction? because it is no more necessary to the constituting the same body, that it should be the body we have to-day, and that is supported by this particular sort of food, than that it should be the body we had *twenty years ago*, or the body we may have the same number of years hereafter; and that have been, or may be nourished by a quite different sort of provision. The restoration of that body that we had in *any period* of life, may be sufficient to give it the denomination of the *same body*: But in truth, this objection hath nothing to do with St. *Paul's* doctrine of the resurrection, who no where says, that the same individual body shall arise, that we lived or died with; but that the dead shall rise, and that they shall rise with bodies in quite different circumstances from those we carried about with us, and laid down in the corruption of the grave; not these *fleskly bodies*, formed of earthly materials, subject to animal passions and appetites, and that sensitive principle, which here hath so great an ascendancy over us, liable to a thousand weaknesses and infirmities, heavy and inactive, attended with many marks of dishonour and causes

causes of humiliation, corruptible in their nature, and always tending to corruption and death ; I say not these bodies, but bodies fashioned by the immediate hand and power of God, not *earthly* ones from earthly materials, but of an *heavenly* substance and composition, *spiritual bodies*, of subtilised matter, active and fit for motion, strong and vigorous, without any thing to hurt and impair them, encompassed with that external brightness and *glory*, that shall be as a robe of honour, and distinguish us as the favourites of God, and that shall be *incorruptible* and immortal, and so render us capable of being the inhabitants of an eternal and imperishable world. And this account utterly destroys the force of this objection against the resurrection, taken from the substance of one man's body being changed into the substance of another's ; for be it so, in the strongest sense that can be supposed, that fleshly earthly substance will constitute no part of our frame at the resurrection, when God will give to all such bodies as it pleases him : I may add, that the *possibility* of the resurrection is in fact demonstrated by the *several persons* our blessed Lord raised to live during his ministry on earth, and especially by his *own resurrection from the dead*, which stands supported by such evidence, as carries the fullest conviction, and will have its proper effect, whilst candor, integrity, and the love of truth shall prevail amongst mankind. But as the *possibility* of the resurrection is thus abundantly evinced, let us proceed

2. To

II. To consider the *objection* against it from the *moral unfitness* of the thing, and its being *unworthy* and *unbecoming* the *wisdom* and *dignity* and *majesty* of God to interest himself for the accomplishment of it. 'Tis allowed on all hands, that this is what the power of the Almighty God is alone equal to ; and it doth by no means certainly follow, that because God *can*, therefore he *will* do it ; and it is as certain, that though it be *possible*, yet that God will *not* do it, if *beneath* him, or *unbecoming* him to do it, as that he could not do it, if it were naturally impossible. And this was one of the objections urged against it by the *ancient* enemies of Christianity, that God cannot do *vile* and *base* things, and will not do things *contrary to nature*, to gratify the unreasonable dispositions and unnatural desires of any persons whatsoever. This argument would lead us into a variety of metaphysical reflections, concerning the nature of the soul, its union with the body, and its dependence on it for its operations and perceptions. But I shall only observe.

1. That this *objection* supposes, that the bodies we now inhabit are *utterly*, and in *all respects inconsistent* with the true perfection and welfare of the reasonable spirit ; that they are its *cages* and *prisons*, and that the minds of men when emancipated from them, and enlarged out of their confinement, and thus become pure and unimbodied spirits, will then attain their real perfection, become capable of much nobler improvements in perception  
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and knowledge, and of a more refined and exalted happiness. This was what many of the *ancient philosophers* imagined, and what hath been argued, from the *spiritual* nature of the soul. But I think no kind of appearances favour this doctrine. We were *formed* in our present circumstances for this *visible and material world*, and therefore these bodies were *necessary*, whatever may be the present disadvantages of them, to render us the *inhabitants* of this material world ; and there is not a single passion or appetite in our frame, but what was well and wisely inserted into it, for purposes of goodness and usefulness. Our bodily sensories are the proper avenues to the mind, her necessary *inlets* to all the ideas and perceptions she hath by sensation. Suppose a man born *blind*, he will be destitute of *ten thousand glorious ideas*, that he entertains who hath the use of sight. Suppose him born *deaf* as well as blind, how much *fewer* will his perceptions be ; and deprive him of all his senses, and what degree of knowledge can we suppose him to be possessed of ? Or what will his mind be otherwise than a blank, with few or no characters and impressions on it ? 'Tis therefore to speak reproachfully of nature, and the God of nature, to censure him in the constitution of our frame, and call these bodies *vile* and *dishonourable*, as *originally* formed by him, which he made wisely and well, and not for our punishment, but for our *advantage* and *happiness*. If we by folly and transgressing the laws of our nature, have debased and rendered



dered them impure, and the causes of many afflictions and distresses to us, to humble and mortify us ; let us *blame ourselves*, and not censure the wisdom and goodness of God *our creator* ; who at first formed our bodies proper mansions for the spirits that were to inhabit them ; and which even in their present state open us to the whole external creation, furnish us with a thousand subjects for consideration and reflection, are avenues to innumerable pleasing and grateful perceptions and sensations, and would be so in a much more constant and uninterrupted manner, if we did not by our own excesses and imprudences, dishonour, injure and corrupt them. And from this connection of our minds with our bodies, and the dependencies our spirits have on them for their sensations and perceptions, in the present state ; it appears to be an unphilosophical and groundless supposition, as it is utterly inconsistent with the scripture representation, that the spirit or mind of man, can, in a state of absolute separation from the body, attain to its full degree of *perfection* and *happiness*. On the contrary, *death*, in the scripture notion, is the *curse* and *punishment of sin*, i. e. the separation of the soul from the body, which punishment can never be removed but by a *resurrection to life*, and therefore reason and revelation herein perfectly agree, that the mind is dependent on the body for many of its operations, and the attainment of its full perfection and happiness ; and therefore it is so far from being beneath or unworthy of God to accomplish

accomplish this great event, as that it becomes necessary in the conduct of his providence and government, in order that men may not be finally and for ever in such a state of privation, as is utterly inconsistent with the dignity of their natures, the improvement of their knowledge, and the completion of their happiness. But then,

2. I would observe, that this *objection* to the resurrection of our bodies, as *unworthy of God*, and *improper* for him to accomplish, arises also from the supposition, that our bodies in their *present state* are to be restored to us at the resurrection; bodies consisting of *flesh and blood*, and liable to all the inconveniencies, disorders and infirmities of those that we now carry about with us. Thus *Celsus* objected; "the Christians absurdly believe, that they who have been a long time dead shall rise out of the ground, cloathed with the same flesh. But what human soul can ever desire to return into a putrified body? God can give the soul immortal life; but dead bodies are viler than the dung, and God cannot render the flesh immortal, contrary to nature." This would have been much more worthy regard, and involved us in real difficulties, if the Gospel had taught, what he supposes, that these fleshly, putrified, mortal bodies should be restored at the resurrection. But a thousand of these objections don't in the least affect the *doctrine of Christianity*, which teaches nothing of what *Celsus* imagines and asserts; but expressly denies it,

and speaks of bodies as far *different* in their materials, constitution and external appearances, as *spirit* is to *matter*, *Heaven* to *Earth*, *glory* to *shame*, *life* to *death*, and *incorruption* to *mortality*. And therefore though it would be difficult to believe, that God should raise religious and good men, with the same disordered animal and perishing bodies, as they lay down in their graves by death ; yet where is the reflection upon the wisdom, and goodness, and providence of God, that he should raise them up to an *heavenly life* and *world*, and invest them with such bodies, as shall be suitable to the nature of that world into which he introduces them, as by the *splendor* of their appearance shall manifest the *dignity* of their condition, as by their *proper sensories* shall render them again capable of *beholding* and *conversing* with the external works of God's creation, shall be *assistent* to the mind in her *noblest* perceptions, and thus contribute their share towards the exalting and compleating our felicity ? This is an event worthy of the power, wisdom, equity and benevolence of God to accomplish, and truly argues him the greatest and best of beings, the lover and the rewarder of righteousness, and the true father and friend of mankind. And from hence we may see how little force there is in,

3. The third and last *objection* to the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, which represents the hope of it as the *hope of worms*, and the *event* itself as absolutely *undesirable*, would or could God extend his power to the  
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effecting it: Whether *to be* or *not to be*, in such circumstances as we are placed in during this life *be best*, is easy to be determined, if we consider the *sentiments of all mankind* in reference to it; who though they may often complain of it, are loth to part with it, and would generally retain it, at any price whereby they could purchase it; and I imagine there are but two circumstances that could determine and reconcile men to part with it; either a *distempered mind and body*, or the *principles of religion*, attended with a well-grounded *hope* of a better existence and world. In the *first*, *despair*, and the strong desire to get rid of *present misery*, may prompt men to put a violent end to life; in the *latter*, the good assurance of a *better* state of things, in exchange for the present, may cause them not only to acquiesce in the thought of their dismissal from the present life, but even to wait with pleasure and satisfaction the appointed hour of it. In all other cases I am apt to think, most persons would be willing to live here, as long as they could, upon the present terms of life; and the restoration to such another period and state of life, would not therefore be looked on by them, as so mean, so contemptible, and undesirable a favour. However, the value of such a restoration would be greatly diminished, in proportion to the numerous imperfections, and various kinds of miseries that attend it; and was this life nothing more than a capacity for sensual gratifications, had it no prof-



pects of futurity, no views of a more durable and substantial happiness in a better constituted state of things, and by consequence no powerful inducements or encouragements to religion and virtue, no consolations to derive superior to those which the present state can minister to us; the *wisest* and the *most thoughtful* men would, I believe, be *indifferent* to the continuance of it, and find little or nothing to induce them to accept it, if offered to them a *second* time. And if the *resurrection*, which the gospel speaks of, was nothing more or better than our *restoration to our bodies*, with all their *present imperfections and disadvantages*, to drag on for a few years the same sort of dull, impertinent, uncertain, mixed, and uncomfortable life as we do now, and then to lay it down in the same circumstances of wretchedness, pain and misery, I confess I should greatly suspect the divine original of the doctrine; because it would in promise be *no encouragement* to piety and virtue, and in the grant *no real recompence* for the love and practice of them; in the offer, such as the wisest men would find the greatest difficulty in thankfully accepting. Not to add, that no good reason can be conceived, why God should permit good men to be deprived of the present life, if he had no better to bestow on them, and if it was his intention to bring them back to the possession of it, without bestowing on them a better, if he was able to do it.

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But the *Christian doctrine* is free from all these embarrassments and difficulties, and the *resurrection* it promises is a blessing worthy of the greatest and best of beings to bestow, and which deserves our best and warmest endeavours to secure the possession of it. A resurrection not only to life, but to *life and immortality*. A resurrection to a body, but not to an earthly, animal, gross, heavy, and mortal one, but to an *heavenly, spiritual, refined, active, and incorruptible* one. It implies the restoration of our whole nature, the revival of our intire constitution, in the two essential parts of it; but both of them in a state of the utmost perfection and dignity. The *mind* intirely free from all moral disorders, and the *body* from all natural; the *mind* in the full possession of every disposition for the highest happiness, the *body* so new moulded and attuned, as to be not the least hindrance, but so as to minister to and promote it; *that* free from every stain of sin, *this* without the least tendency and inducement to it; *that* fitted for immediate converse with God, *this* able to bear his presence, and the fullest manifestations of his glory; the one conformed to the image of Christ in all the beauties of perfect holiness, the other fully resembling his glorified body, that they may appear with a splendor worthy the high character of his genuine disciples; the one in sanctity and dignity *equal to Angels*, the other with a covering of *light and glory*, that shall put them upon a level with *those stars of the morning*; in a word,  
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we shall, in our intire persons, be fully prepared for the heavenly mansions of blessedness, capable of entering into all the employments and sacred services of God's heavenly kingdom, and of sharing in all the joys and satisfactions that infinite wisdom and goodness hath liberally prepared for the everlasting entertainment of the children and favourites of the eternal Father.

O glorious hope and blessed prospect ! How full of *consolation* is the thought ? What pleasure doth this expectation create in the minds of sincere Christians ? What consolation inspire amidst the uncertainties and distresses of life ? Can piety and virtue have a *nobler reward* ? How fully will all the self-denials and labours of religion by this resurrection be rewarded ? How high an *incentive* is this to renounce the corruptions of life, to keep ourselves free from the impurities of it, to *perfect holiness in the fear of God*, and to abound in all the good works and virtues, to which our Christian profession obliges us ? What could be an higher *encouragement* to all works of *mercy and goodness*, to comfort and relieve the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind, than what our blessed Master hath assured us of : *Tbou shalt be blessed ; for they cannot recompence thee ; for thou shalt be recompenced at the resurrection of the just* §. It is a good expectancy and *sure reversion*, Christians. Should God reward your bounty and friendship to those

§ Luke xiv. 14.

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that are in distress, and that deserve and need your assistance, with a temporal reward only, it would be but a precarious uncertain reward, which you must soon part with. But his rewards are more durable. They are indeed reserved for a future state. But that state is certain, the recompence of it unspeakably great, and of an eternal duration. Do you believe these truths? I know you believe them. Suffer them then to have their proper influence over you, and excite you to all the proper instances of benevolence and goodness. Is not the gospel doctrine, that brings you these glad tidings of an eternal triumph over death, by a glorious resurrection to life and immortality, every way worthy your acceptance? Would you not have the knowledge of it kept up in the world? Would you not willingly be the happy instruments of God's providence and grace, in preparing others for a share in this glorious event, and rejoice in the last great day, that God hath honoured you to be the happy means of promoting the redemption of others? This you may be, by assisting them with the means of instruction, piety and goodness. It is placing out our money to the best advantage and interest. It is laying it out in a secure and permanent fund. The miser may laugh at this, and men of no principles may condemn it. But whilst religion is a reality, there is no truth more certain, than that the benevolence of righteous and pious men shall be amply rewarded. Under this persuasion you will want no farther inducement



inducement to offer to God this sacrifice of good works, according to your ability, and as God hath prospered you; and then hereafter, when they *who have shewn no mercy to many shall obtain as little mercy from God, you shall go into life eternal, with this kind acknowledgement from the supream and universal judge: Verily I say unto you, in as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

END of the FIRST VOLUME.



